GERHART HAUPTMANN

DRAMATIC WORKS

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THE DRAMATIC WORKS
OF
Gerhart Hauptmann

VOLUME FOUR:

THE ASSUMPTION OF HANNELE
THE SUNKEN BELL
HENRY OF AUË

THE DRAMATIC WORKS
OF
GERHART HAUPTMANN

(AUTHORIZED EDITION)

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VOLUME FOUR:
SYMBOLIC AND LEGENDARY DRAMAS

NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH
1914

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The exclusive predominance of Naturalism in the modern drama was singularly brief. In France it may be said never to have existed; in Germany it was publicly broken by the far-reaching success of Ludwig Fulda's *Der Talisman* in 1892. All the intellectual currents of these years flowed in one direction. In 1895 Brunetière declared the bankruptcy of positivistic science in its attempt to satisfy man's deeper needs. At the same time influences as sharply divided from each other as Nietzsche's and Anatole France's combined to discredit the theory of art which had been defended on the ground of its analogy to the sciences of observation. The new idealism was, to be sure, not very robust. It was neither aggressive nor hopeful. Like Pragmatism in philosophy, it was, often enough, a shirking of the austerer issues of thought.

" Si tu gardes ta foi, qu'importe qu'elle mente? "

Thus Anatole France had written even in the verses of his youth. But timid, wavering, uncertain of itself as it was, the new movement spread from country to country. Maeterlinck began to weave his unearthly dreams; Ibsen was confirmed in the tendency to symbolism that germinates in the plays of his middle period; Strindberg turned mystic; Rostand gave new life to the romantic

drama in verse. Various as these manifestations were, they sprang from a common weariness of the hardness of truth and the pitilessness of life.

The present volume of this series contains the three plays which form, in many respects, Hauptmann's most notable contribution to the neo-romantic movement in modern literature. Stern and consistent naturalist though he was and has, in many of his works, continued to be, the new movement liberated a whole side of his temperament. The mysticism of his Silesian ancestors was stirred to a new life; the pent-up poet could write verse again.

Hannele (1892) is still, quite clearly, a compromise. The milieu of the child's life is marked with complete verisimilitude; her heavenly visions and the beautiful verses that she hears are admitted only as the dreams of a disordered fancy. But in these very verses Hauptmann's poetic powers were first shown in their maturity. The poems of his youth give one a sense of awkwardness, of futility. The chorus of the angels in *Hannele* is firmly and delicately wrought; the anapæsts of the original have sweetness and nobility at once.

A profound personal conflict and the humiliating failure of *Florian Geyer* combined to arouse in Hauptmann the impulse toward a direct expression of himself and his perplexities — an expression which is possible, through the medium of the drama, only in verse and only by raising the concrete realities of experience into the domain of the timeless. The result of that impulse was *The Sunken Bell* (1896).

The play, then, is the drama of the creative thinker of modern times. The problem of the

modern artist and thinker is — as Hauptmann has shown in *Lonely Lives* and again, quite recently, in *Gabriel Schilling's Flight* — the conflict between the personal life and ideal ends. However blended with other motifs — the kernel of the play is there. The faith by which Heinrich, the bell-founder, lives, is the presence in him of the creative power.

"What's germed within me's worthy of the blessing —
Worthy the ripening."

His one aim is to see that germ ripen, regardless of the world and its rewards, regardless of his personal happiness. To understand the play it is necessary to understand the reality and sincerity of that conception. To the true artist all forms and features of life, all beauty and success, bring only a deeper pang if his central aim is unrealised. And it is this truth which the homely environment of Heinrich's personal life fails to understand and to support. His bell falls into the mere. And Magda, his wife, says:

"Pray heaven that be the worst!
What matters one bell more or less! If he
The master, be but safe!"

The master is alive, though full of despair, because the bell — he knows — was hurled down the hills by no mere chance.

"'Twas for the valley, not the mountain-top!"

And to this cry of the artist's despair his wife replies:

"That is not true! Hadst thou but heard as I
The vicar tell the clerk in tones that shook:
'How gloriously 'twill sound upon the heights!'"

The opinion of the vicar and the clerk are her norm. Of the unapproached ideal she knows nothing. Thus Heinrich, driven by what is deepest in him, goes into the hills and finds in nature a spirit of beauty and refreshment — Rautendelein — who will help him to find his treasure. There is no hardness of heart in him. He cannot help Magda. For to her "his wine would be but bitter gall and venom." He stays upon those heights with Rautendelein to build the great work that shall embody his dreams. The ignorant cries of hidebound men serve only to convince him more

"Of the great weight and purpose of his mission."

And yet he fails. It is the tragedy of his too human soul. For he has really left his heart, his earthly affections, in the valleys of his other life:

"Yonder I am at home . . . and yet a stranger —
Here I am strange . . . and yet I am at home."

His children bring their mother's tears up the mountain side, and the sunken bell, stirred by her dead hand, tolls the destruction of his hopes. And yet he dies, clasping the ideal with all his strength. For it is better to die so than to return to the valleys where the ideal is a stranger and an outcast.

The fable of *Henry of Auë* (1902) is a simpler one. The play's message — if so inapt a word may be applied to a work of art — is larger, and is curiously allied to certain tendencies in con-

temporary philosophy. For the crux of the play is this: How is Henry healed of his fatal ill? The mediæval miracle of blood is rejected. The process of his healing begins when hate and despair leave his soul; the good comes with his belief in its possibility. His will helps the Beneficence that is at the core of things. That will to believe arises first in Ottegebe, then in him. To both it is revealed that

"The heavenly seeming is the heavenly truth."

It is quite possible to regard the healing of the leper as symbolical despite the concrete reality of the play's characters and action. Yet it remains true that Hauptmann here sounds the least uncertain note of spiritual hope in the entire neo-romantic movement and allies himself unmistakably with ancient sanctities treasured in the heart of the race.

"O Hartmann, like a soulless husk of flesh,
An evil wizard's creature of dead slime,
And not God's child — fashioned of stone or brass —
Such art thou till the pure, ethereal stream
Of the divine has poured its living fire
Into the hull mysterious which hides
The miracle of being from our ken.
Then art thou thrilled with life. Unfettered, free,
The immortal light fills full thy mortal breast,
Radiantly breaking through thy prison's walls,
Redeeming, melting thee and all thy world
In the eternal universe of love."

The meaning of both *The Sunken Bell* and *Henry of Auë*, however, is subsidiary to the purely

poetic value of the plays. German criticism is, as a rule, careless of what Saintsbury well calls the doctrine of the poetic moment. I am unwilling to follow it in that error. A handful of great verses is better than the poet's brooding thoughts concerning the riddle of the painful earth. Beauty abides, but opinion perishes. And in these two plays, notably in *Henry of Auë,* Hauptmann has again and again succeeded in blending the inevitable image with noble music.

That poetic beauty must always be obscured by translation. Nevertheless the excellent versions of Mr. Meltzer have already made a distinct place for themselves with the English reading public. In my own version of *Henry of Auë,* I have sought to preserve the exact modulation of the original verses, the music of the verse paragraph, the alternate poignancy and homeliness of Hauptmann's diction. This seemed never quite impossible to do when the poet was at the height of a given situation; it was far more difficult in the level passages that necessarily occur in every long poem. It is easier, in English verse, "to tell a fine story finely," than "to tell a plain story plainly"—and yet poetically.

LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

THE ASSUMPTION OF HANNELE

A DREAM POEM

TO MY WIFE

MARIE

BORN THIENEMANN

Children pluck red clover, pluck out the blossoms carefully and suck the pale, fine stems. A faint sweetness comes to their tongues. If you can get even as much sweetness out of my poem, I shall not be ashamed of my gift.

GERHART.

CHARACTERS

HANNELE

GOTTWALD (*afterwards* THE STRANGER), *a Schoolmaster*

SISTER MARTHA, *a Deaconess*

TULPE
HETE (Hedwig)
PLESCHKE
HANKE
} *Inmates of an Almshouse*

SEIDEL, *a Woodcutter*

BERGER, *a Magistrate*

SCHMIDT, *a Police Official*

DR. WACHLER

APPARITIONS INTRODUCED DURING HANNELE'S DELIRIUM

MATTERN (*a Mason*), *supposed to be* HANNELE'S *Father*

THE FORM OF HANNELE'S DEAD MOTHER

A GREAT DARK ANGEL

THREE ANGELS OF LIGHT

THE DEACONESS

THE STRANGER

GOTTWALD'S PUPILS

CHARACTERS

Pleschke
Hanke and other Paupers
Seidel
A Village Doctor
Four Youths, clad in white
Numerous Bright Angels, great and small
Mourners
Women, Etc.

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE — *A room in the almshouse of a village in the mountains. Bare walls. A door at centre, back. To the left of this door is a small window. Before the window are a rickety table and a bench. Near the table and to the left of it is a stove.*

To the right of the door is a pallet with a straw mattress and a few ragged coverlets.

It is a stormy December evening.

At the table, seated and singing a hymn which she reads from a hymn book, by the light of a tallow candle, sits TULPE, *an old, ragged pauper.*

The stage directions as to "right" and "left" are given from the actor's standpoint.

TULPE

[*Sings in a cracked, quavering voice.*]

"Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the waves of tr-ouble. . . ."

[*Enter* HEDWIG, *familiarly known as* HETE, *a disreputable woman of about thirty, with curly hair. Round her head is wrapped a thick cloth. She carries a bundle under her arm. Her dress is light and shabby.*

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HETE

[*Blowing on her fingers.*] Mercy on us, nice weather we're havin'. [*Drops her bundle on the table and goes on blowing her fingers, standing alternately on each of her feet, which are shod in worn-out old boots.*] We ain't had such weather for an age.

TULPE

What have yer got in there?

HETE

[*Grinning and whining with pain, sits on the bench by the stove and tries to take off her boots.*] Oh, Lord! My blessed toes are just burnin'!

TULPE

[*Unties* HETE's *bundle, in which are seen a loaf, a packet of chicory, a bag of coffee, a few pairs of stockings, etc.*] Ain't there nothin' for me in your bundle?

HETE

[*At first too busy with her boots to mind* TULPE. *Suddenly snatches at the bundle and collects its contents.*] Tulpe! [*One of* HETE's *feet is bare. She piles her belongings together and carries them off to the pallet.*] Now you'd best leave my things alone — D'you think I've been trampin' about and freezin' all the bones in my body for *you,* eh?

TULPE

Ah, yer needn't make such a fuss about it, you fool! [*Rises, closes her hymn book, and wipes it carefully with her skirt.*] I don't want none of the rubbish you've been beggin' for.

HETE

[*Hiding her property under the mattress.*] Beggin'? I'd like to know who's done most beggin'— you or me! You've done nothin' else all your life. And you're no chicken, neither.

TULPE

Don't you fly out about it. We know the sort er life *you've* led. Pastor told you what he thought of *you,* he did. I didn't tramp about the streets when *I* was a girl. *I* was respect'ble.

HETE

I s'pose that's why you were sent to jail!

TULPE

You'll get there fast enough, don't you fear, my beauty. Just you let me get a sight of a gendarme, that's all. I could tell him a thing or two about you, 's sure's yer live!

HETE

Oh, shut up! I don't care for your gendarmes. Let 'em come and see if I don't tell 'em somethin' as'll make you feel uncomfort'ble.

TULPE

Yer can't say nothin' against me!

HETE

Oh, I can't, can't I? Who stole the overcoat from the innkeeper's little boy, eh? [TULPE *makes as though to spit at* HETE.] That's what you call manners, I s'pose? Yer shan't have nothin' now, just to spite yer.

TULPE

Ah, go on! I wouldn't take anythin' from the likes er you, anyhow.

HETE

No, and you won't get nothin'.

[PLESCHKE *and* HANKE *appear outside the open door, against which they have been literally blown by the howling wind.* PLESCHKE, *a scrofulous, childish old man, in rags, bursts out laughing.* HANKE, *a good-for-nothing blackguard, blasphemes. They are seen to shake the snow off their hats and cloaks. Each carries a bundle.*

PLESCHKE

Lord, how it do blow! One er these 'ere nights, you see if the old shanty ain't smashed to bits!

[*At sight of the newcomers,* HETE *hurriedly drags her bundle from beneath the mattress, picks it up and runs past the men into the courtyard and up a flight of stairs.*

PLESCHKE

[*Calling after* HETE.] Hey! Hulloa! Yer in a hurry! Wot are yer runnin' away fur? We won't hurt yer, will we, Hanke?

TULPE

[*Busy at the stove with a saucepan.*] Oh, she ain't right in her head. She thinks you'll steal her bundle.

PLESCHKE

[*Enters.*] Lord save us! That's rough on us, that is! Evenin'! G'd evenin'! Good Lord, what weather! Hang me if I wasn't a'most blown off my feet!

[*Limps to the table, lays his bundle down,*

and wags his white-haired, feeble head at Tulpe. *Pants from fatigue, coughs and tries to warm himself. Meanwhile,* Hanke *enters, lays his beggar's bag against the door and shivers with cold as he puts fuel into the stove.*

Tulpe

Where er you been?

Pleschke

[*Stuttering.*] Where — where have I been? Quite a way, quite a way. Up in the hills.

Tulpe

Brought anythin' back?

Pleschke

Lots — lots of things. Th' priest giv' me this 'ere five-pfenniger, and down at th' inn they give me — er — give me — er — a bowl er soup —

Tulpe

Hand it over, and I'll warm it up.

[*Takes a pot out of the bundle, sets it on the table and stirs the contents of the saucepan.*

Pleschke

I — I've got somethin' else in here — sausage. The butcher give it to me. Ay, the butcher.

Tulpe

Where's the money?

Pleschke

Oh, the money's all right. Here's the money.

TULPE

Give it t' me. I'll take care of it for yer.

HETE

[*Re-enters.*] Yer blamed old fool, why d' yer let her have it?

[*She goes to the stove.*

TULPE

You mind yer own business.

HANKE

Don't worry. He's her sweetheart.

HETE

Saints alive!

HANKE

It's only right he should bring her home a trifle now and then, ain't it?

PLESCHKE

[*Stammering.*] You — you ought — oughter know — better, you ought. Can't yer leave a poor old man alone an'— n — not make game of him?

HETE

[*Mimicking* PLESCHKE.] W — why d — don't yer l — let the poor old man alone? Pleschke, yer gettin' shaky. You won't last much longer.

PLESCHKE

[*Threatening her with a stick.*] Y — you'd best c — clear outer this!

HETE

I'd like to see you make me clear out.

PLESCHKE

Clear out! D' ye hear?

TULPE

Catch her one on the head. It'll do her good.

PLESCHKE

Clear out!

HANKE

Oh, drop it! Leave her alone.

[HETE, *taking advantage of* HANKE'S *having turned his back to defend her from* PLESCHKE, *makes a grab at his bag and tries to steal something from it.* TULPE *sees her and shakes with laughter.*

HANKE

I don't see much to laugh about.

TULPE

[*Still laughing.*] He don't see nothin' to laugh at!

PLESCHKE

Oh, Lord, just look at her!

TULPE

Yer'd best look arter yer bag, or maybe you'll miss somethin'.

HANKE

[*Turns and sees that he has been tricked.*] You would, would you, you devil! . [*Rushes after* HETE.] Just you let me get at you!

[*Tramping of feet, as* HANKE *runs up the staircase after* HETE. *Smothered cries.*

PLESCHKE

Well, well, well! She's a smart 'un.

[*He laughs.*

[TULPE *joins in his laughter, which is interrupted by the sound of the sudden opening and shutting of a door.*

W — what was that?

[*Howling wind heard outside. Snow dashes against the window-panes. Then all is quiet for a moment. The schoolmaster,* GOTTWALD, *a man of two-and-thirty, with a dark beard, enters, carrying* HANNELE MATTERN, *a girl of about fourteen. The child whimpers. Her long red hair streams over the schoolmaster's shoulders, her face is pressed against his throat, her arms hang straight and limp. The rags in which she is clothed barely cover her.* GOTTWALD *takes no notice of* PLESCHKE *and* TULPE, *carries the child in tenderly, and lays her on the bed, which stands on the right near the wall. He is followed by* SEIDEL, *a wood-cutter, who carries a lantern in one hand. He also carries a saw, an axe, and a bundle of rags. On his grey head he wears a shabby old hat.*

PLESCHKE

[*Staring stupidly at the newcomers.*] Hulloa, hulloa, hulloa! W — what's the matter?

GOTTWALD

[*Laying his overcoat and some blankets over* HANNELE.] Hot bricks, Seidel! Quick.

SEIDEL

[*To* TULPE.] Don't stand there doin' nothin'. Heat some bricks. Look sharp!

TULPE

What's the matter with the girl?

SEIDEL

I've no time for talkin'.

[*Exit with* TULPE.

GOTTWALD

[*Trying to soothe* HANNELE.] There, there, don't you fear. We'll soon put you right.

HANNELE

[*Her teeth chattering.*] I'm afraid! I'm afraid!

GOTTWALD

Fear nothing. We won't let any harm come to you.

HANNELE

It's father! It's father!

GOTTWALD

Why, he's not here, my dear.

HANNELE

I'm afraid of father. Oh, if he should come!

GOTTWALD

Ssh! Ssh! He won't come.

[*Hurried steps are heard on the staircase.* HETE *bustles in, with an iron grater in her hand.*

HETE

[*Holding up the grater.*] Just look what Hanke's got!

[Hanke *rushes in after* Hete *and tries to take the grater from her. She flings it into the middle of the room.*

Hannele

[*Screams with terror.*] He's coming! He's coming!

[*She half rises, leans forward, with anguish on her pale, sick, pinched little face, and stares at the place from which the noise comes.* Hete *dodges away from* Hanke *and runs into the back room.* Hanke *goes to pick up the grater.*

Hanke

[*Astonished.*] I'll give you a taste of it presently, you slut, you!

Gottwald

[*To* Hannele.] It's all right, my child. [*To* Hanke.] What are you doing here?

Hanke

What am *I* doin' here?

Hete

[*Putting her head in at the back door.*] 'Tain't his! He stole it!

Hanke

[*Threatening.*] You wait a bit! I'll get even with you.

Gottwald

I beg you to be quiet. The child's ill.

Hanke

[*Picks up the grater and draws back abashed.*] Why, what's the matter?

SEIDEL

[*Enters with two bricks.*] These ought to do.

GOTTWALD

[*Examining the bricks.*] Are they warm enough?

SEIDEL

Oh, they'll warm her.

[*He puts one of the bricks under* HANNELE'S *feet.*

GOTTWALD

Put the other one there.

[*Points to another place.*

SEIDEL

She don't seem much warmer yet.

GOTTWALD

The child's shivering with cold.

[TULPE *has entered, following* SEIDEL. *Behind her enter* HETE *and* PLESCHKE *and several other paupers, who stand in the doorway whispering and fussing about inquisitively.* TULPE *moves to the bedside and stands there with her arms akimbo.*

TULPE

Brandy and hot water 'ud do her good.

SEIDEL

[*Pulls out a flask. So do* PLESCHKE *and* HANKE.] There's just a drop left.

TULPE

[*At the stove.*] Bring it here.

SEIDEL

Is the water hot?

TULPE

Scaldin'!

GOTTWALD

You'd better put in a lump of sugar.

HETE

Where d'yer s'pose we'd get sugar from?

TULPE

Ah, shut up! Yer know yer've got some stowed away.

HETE

Yer lie. I ain't got no sugar.

[*Laughs nervously.*

TULPE

It's *you* that's lyin'. I saw yer bring it in.

SEIDEL

[*To* HETE.] Run and get it, can't you?

HANKE

[*To* HETE.] What are yer waitin' for?

HETE

[*Doggedly.*] Fetch it yerself.

PLESCHKE

Get the sugar!

HETE

Yer can get all yer want at the grocer's.

[*Exit.*

SEIDEL

And if you don't get some at the grocer's, double quick time — Well, you'll see! That's all I've

got to say. You won't want more nor I'll give you, my lass.

PLESCHKE

[*Who has been out, returns.*] Ah, she's a bad lot, she is.

SEIDEL

I'd like to have the handlin' of her. I'd take her down a bit, I would, if I was the Burgomaster. She's got no business to be in an almshouse — a great, big, healthy slut like her. Why don't she work?

PLESCHKE

H — here's a — b — b — bit of sugar.

HANKE

[*Sniffing the aroma of the grog.*] I'd like to be ill myself, I would!

[SCHMIDT *enters with a lantern. His manner is important and impressive.*

SCHMIDT

Now then, make room there. The judge'll be here in a moment.

[BERGER, *the magistrate, enters. His manner stamps him as a retired officer. He wears a short beard. Although his hair is grizzled, he seems still youthful and good-looking. He wears a well-cut, long overcoat. His cocked hat is set jauntily on his head. One of his characteristics is a boyish swagger.*

THE PAUPERS

Evenin', Judge. Evenin', Captain!

BERGER

Evenin'. [*Takes off his hat and cloak and puts them down with his stick. With a commanding gesture.*] Out with you, the whole lot of you!

[SCHMIDT *hustles* THE PAUPERS *into the back room.*

BERGER

Evenin', Schoolmaster. [*Holds out his hand.*] How are you getting on?

GOTTWALD

We've just pulled the child out of the water!

SEIDEL

[*Stepping forward.*] Excuse me, Judge. [*Makes a military salute.*] I was working later than usual down at t' smithy. You see, I was puttin' a new clamp round my axe — and just as I was comin' out er — t' smithy — down yonder by the pond, Judge — you know the big pond — it's pretty nigh as big as a lake — [BERGER *makes an impatient gesture.*] Yes, Judge. Well, there's a corner in that pond as never freezes over — I can call to mind when I was a boy —

BERGER

Never mind that. Go on with your story.

SEIDEL

[*Saluting again.*] Yes, Cap'n. Well — as I was sayin', I'd just come out o' t' smithy and was standin' in th' moonlight, when I heard some one cryin'. At first I thought it was only some one makin' believe, as you might say. But happenin' to look toward the pond, I saw somethin' in the water! Yes, Judge. Where it never freezes over.

I called out to say I was a-comin', but she'd fainted! Well, I just ran back and fetched a plank from t' smithy and laid it over the hole — and in a moment I had brought her safe to land again.

BERGER

Bravo, Seidel. We don't hear that sort of tale every day. We hear more about quarrelling and fighting, and head-breaking, down in the village . . . And then, I suppose, you brought her straight up here?

SEIDEL

Excuse me, Judge. It was the teacher —

GOTTWALD

I happened to be passing by on my way home from a lecture. So I took her to my house first and got my wife to find some warm clothes for her.

BERGER

What do you make of the affair?

SEIDEL

[*Hesitating.*] Well, you see — h'm. She's Mattern's stepdaughter.

BERGER

[*Seems shocked.*] That ragged little thing Mattern's stepdaughter?

SEIDEL

Ay. Her mother died six weeks ago. . . . There ain't much more to tell. She kicked and scratched because she thought I was her stepfather.

BERGER

[*Thinking of* MATTERN, *mutters.*] The scoundrel!

SEIDEL

He's bin sittin' at the inn, drinkin' hard, ever since yesterday. It takes a cask to fill *him* up, it does.

BERGER

He'll have a score to settle with me, for this job. [*Bends over* HANNELE.] Now, my child. Listen. You needn't cry about it. What's the girl looking at me like that for? . . . I won't hurt you. What's your name? . . . A little louder, please. I can't hear you — [*He rises.*] The child seems very stubborn.

GOTTWALD

She's only frightened . . . Hannele!

HANNELE

[*Gasping.*] Yes, sir!

GOTTWALD

Do as the Judge bids you, child.

HANNELE

[*Shivering.*] Dear Lord, I'm freezing!

SEIDEL

[*Bringing in the grog.*] There. Take a drop o' this, my lass.

HANNELE

[*As before.*] Dear Lord, I'm hungry!

GOTTWALD

[*To the Magistrate.*] It's no use. We can't make her drink.

HANNELE

It hurts!

GOTTWALD

Where does it hurt you, little one?

HANNELE

Oh, I'm afraid! I'm afraid!

BERGER

Who's frightening you, my dear? Come, come, now. Tell us all about it. Don't be afraid. What was that? — I can't understand a word you're saying. Try and remember how it happened. Did your stepfather ill-treat you? — Did he beat you or lock you up or — turn you out into the street? — It's hard to get anything out of her —

SEIDEL

Ay! She ain't fond er chatterin'! Choppin' trees is easier nur makin' *her* talk. She's as still as a mouse, *she* is.

BERGER

If we only had facts to go on — we might have the fellow locked up.

GOTTWALD

She's terribly afraid of him.

SEIDEL

'Tain't the first time, neither, as he's been caught at this sort of game. Jest you ask the folks about him. They'll tell you what sort of man he is. It's a wonder she wasn't killed years ago.

BERGER

What has he done to her?

SEIDEL

Done? — Druv her out o' doors o' nights.

That's what he's done to her. Sent her out a-beggin' in the snow. That's what he's done. And if she didn't bring him back enough to get him roarin' drunk, out she'd have to go agen. That's what he's done. Many's the night she's froze and cried her eyes out, she has.

GOTTWALD

It wasn't quite so bad while her mother lived.

BERGER

Well, anyhow, we'll have the man arrested. He's a notorious drunkard. Now, my little maid, just look me straight in the face.

HANNELE

[*Imploringly.*] Oh, please, please, please!

SEIDEL

'Tain't no use your askin' questions. You won't get nothin' out o' her.

GOTTWALD

[*Gently.*] Hannele!

HANNELE

Yes, sir.

GOTTWALD

Do you know me?

HANNELE

Yes, sir.

GOTTWALD

Who am I?

HANNELE

Teacher, sir — Teacher Gottwald.

GOTTWALD

That's right. We're getting along famously.

Now, my dear child, tell us all about it. Don't be afraid. How is it you did not stay at home instead of going down to the pond by the blacksmith's? Eh?

HANNELE

I'm afraid! I'm afraid!

BERGER

We'll go away, and you can say all you have to say to the schoolmaster.

HANNELE

[*Shyly and mysteriously.*] He called me!

GOTTWALD

Who called you, my dear?

HANNELE

The Lord Jesus.

GOTTWALD

Where did the Lord Jesus call you?

HANNELE

From the water.

GOTTWALD

Where?

HANNELE

Why, from the bottom of the water.

BERGER

[*Changing his mind and putting on his overcoat.*] We'd better have the doctor fetched. I daresay he's not left the inn yet.

GOTTWALD

I have sent for one of the Sisters. The child needs very careful nursing.

BERGER

I'll go for the doctor at once. [*To* SCHMIDT.] Bring the policeman to me at the inn, Schmidt. We'll have the fellow locked up. Good-night, Schoolmaster.

[BERGER *and* SCHMIDT *exeunt.* HANNELE *falls asleep.*

SEIDEL

[*After a pause.*] He won't lock him up. Not much.

GOTTWALD

Why not?

SEIDEL

He knows why, *he* does. *Who's the girl's father,* eh?

GOTTWALD

Stuff, Seidel. That's all gossip.

SEIDEL

All right. I knows what I knows.

GOTTWALD

You mustn't mind what people say. Half are lies.— I only wish the doctor would make haste.

SEIDEL

[*Softly.*] She won't get over it. You'll see.

[*Enter* DR. WACHLER, *a grave-looking man of four-and-thirty.*

DR. WACHLER

Good evening!

GOTTWALD

Good evening, Doctor.

SEIDEL

[*Helping the* DOCTOR *to take off his fur overcoat.*] Good evening, Doctor.

DR. WACHLER

[*Warming his hands at the stove.*] I should like another candle. [*The sound of a barrel-organ comes from the adjoining room.*] They must have lost their wits!

SEIDEL

[*At the half-closed door of the back room.*] Can't you keep quiet in there?

[*Noise ceases.* SEIDEL *goes into the back room.*

DR. WACHLER

Mr. Gottwald, I believe?

GOTTWALD

That is my name.

DR. WACHLER

I hear she tried to drown herself?

GOTTWALD

She saw no other way out of her troubles, poor child.

[*Short pause.*]

DR. WACHLER

[*Watching* HANNELE *beside her bed.*] Has she been talking in her sleep?

HANNELE

Millions and millions of stars! [DR. WACHLER *and* GOTTWALD *watch the child. Through the window the moonlight streams on the group.*]

Why are you pulling at my bones? Don't! Don't! It hurts, oh, it *does* hurt so!

DR. WACHLER

[*Carefully loosening the collar of* HANNELE's *chemise.*] Her body is a mass of bruises!

SEIDEL

Ah, and that's how her mother looked when she was put in her coffin!

DR. WACHLER

Shocking! Shocking!

HANNELE

[*In a changed, peevish voice.*] I won't go home. I won't! I want to go to Dame Holle.— Let me go to the pond.— Let me go! — Oh, that dreadful, dreadful smell! — Father, you've been drinking brandy again! — Hark! how the wind blows in the wood! — There was a storm in the hills this morning.— Oh, I do hope there won't be a fire.— Do you hear? Oh, what a storm! — It'll blow the tailor away, if he hasn't put his goose in his pocket!

[*Enter* SISTER MARTHA.

GOTTWALD

Good evening, Sister.

[SISTER MARTHA *bends her head in response.* GOTTWALD *joins her at the back of the stage, where she is getting everything ready for nursing.*

HANNELE

Where's mother? In heaven? How far away it is! [*She opens her eyes, stares about her in a*

dazed way, rubs her eyes slowly and says in an almost inaudible voice:] Where am I?

DR. WACHLER

[*Bending over her.*] You're with friends, Hannele.

HANNELE

I'm thirsty.

DR. WACHLER

Water!

[SEIDEL, *who has brought in another candle, goes out to get some water.*

DR. WACHLER

Does it pain you anywhere? [HANNELE *shakes her head.*] No. That's first-rate. We'll soon put you right.

HANNELE

Please, sir, are you the doctor?

DR. WACHLER

Yes, my dear.

HANNELE

Am I very, very ill?

DR. WACHLER

No, no! Not *very* ill.

HANNELE

Are you going to make me well again?

DR. WACHLER

[*Examining her quickly.*] Does that hurt? No! Does that? Ah, this is the place! — Don't be frightened! I won't hurt you. Is this where the pain is?

GOTTWALD

[*Returning to the bedside.*] Answer the doctor, Hannele.

HANNELE

[*Earnestly, imploringly, tearfully.*] Oh, *dear* Teacher Gottwald!

GOTTWALD

Come, come! Attend to what the doctor says and answer his questions. [HANNELE *shakes her head.*] No? Why not?

HANNELE

Oh, do, *do* let me go to mother!

GOTTWALD

[*Deeply moved — strokes her hair gently.*] Don't, don't say that, my child.

[*Short pause.*]

[*The* DOCTOR *lifts his head, draws a long breath and reflects for a moment.* SISTER MARTHA *has brought the lighted candle from the table and stands near by, holding it.*

DR. WACHLER

[*Beckons to* SISTER MARTHA.] One moment, Sister.

[*The* DOCTOR *and* SISTER MARTHA *retire to the table. The* DOCTOR *gives the* SISTER *some instructions in an undertone.* GOTTWALD *glances at* HANNELE, *the* SISTER, *and the* DOCTOR *alternately. He stands waiting, hat in hand.*

[DR. WACHLER *ends his quiet talk with* SISTER MARTHA.

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I'll look in again later on. I'll have the medicine sent round. [*To* Gottwald.] It seems they have arrested the man at the inn.

Sister Martha

Yes. So they say.

Dr. Wachler

[*Putting on his overcoat. To* Seidel.] You'd better come to the apothecary's with me.

[*The* Doctor, Gottwald *and* Seidel *take leave of* Sister Martha *quietly as they move toward the door.*

Gottwald

[*In a casual way.*] What do you think of the case, Doctor?

[Doctor, Gottwald *and* Seidel *exeunt.*
[Sister Martha, *who is now alone with* Hannele, *pours some milk into a bowl. Meanwhile,* Hannele *opens her eyes and watches her.*

Hannele

Have you come from Jesus?

Sister Martha

What did you say, dear?

Hannele

Have you come from the Lord Jesus?

Sister Martha

Why, Hannele, have you forgotten me? I'm Sister Martha. Don't you remember coming to see us one day and praying and singing those beautiful hymns?

HANNELE

[*Nodding joyfully.*] Oh, yes, yes. Such beautiful, beautiful hymns!

SISTER MARTHA

I've come to nurse you, in God's name, till you get well.

HANNELE

I don't want to get well.

SISTER MARTHA

[*Bringing her the milk.*] The doctor says you must take a little of this milk, to make you strong again.

HANNELE

[*Turns away.*] I don't *want* to get well.

SISTER MARTHA

Don't want to get well? That's not sensible, my dear. There, let me tie your hair up.

[*She ties her hair.*

HANNELE

[*Crying quietly.*] I don't want to get well.

SISTER MARTHA

Well, I declare! Why not?

HANNELE

Oh, how I *long* to go to heaven, Sister.

SISTER MARTHA

We all long for that, darling. But we must be patient and wait until God calls us, and then, if we repent of our sins —

HANNELE

[*Eagerly.*] I *do* repent, Sister! Indeed, indeed I do!

SISTER MARTHA

— and if we believe in the Lord Jesus —

HANNELE

I *do* believe in Him!

SISTER MARTHA

Then you may wait in peace, my child.— Let me smooth your pillow for you.— There. Now go to sleep.

HANNELE

I can't sleep.

SISTER MARTHA

Oh, yes, you can, if you try.

HANNELE

Sister Martha!

SISTER MARTHA

Well, dear?

HANNELE

Sister! Are there any — any unpardonable sins?

SISTER MARTHA

We won't talk about that now. You must not excite yourself.

HANNELE

Please, please, please! Won't you tell me?

SISTER MARTHA

Yes, yes. There *are* sins that God won't pardon — sins against the Holy Ghost!

HANNELE

Oh, do you think I've committed one?

SISTER MARTHA

Nonsense. Why, only very, *very* wicked people,

like Judas, who betrayed our Lord, could commit those sins.

HANNELE

You don't know — you don't know.

SISTER MARTHA

Hush. You must go to sleep.

HANNELE

I'm so afraid.

SISTER MARTHA

You need not be.

HANNELE

But if I have committed one?

SISTER MARTHA

Oh, but you haven't.

HANNELE

[*Clings to the* SISTER *and stares into the darkness.*] Sister! Sister!

SISTER MARTHA

Hush, dear, hush!

HANNELE

Sister!

SISTER MARTHA

What is it?

HANNELE

He's coming. Can't you hear him?

SISTER MARTHA

I hear nothing.

HANNELE

That's his voice — outside! Hark!

SISTER MARTHA

Whose voice?

HANNELE

Father's! Father's! There he is!

SISTER MARTHA

Where? I don't see him.

HANNELE

Look!

SISTER MARTHA

Where?

HANNELE

At the foot of the bed!

SISTER MARTHA

It's only this coat and hat, darling. We'll take the nasty things away and give them to Daddy Pleschke. And then I'll bring some water and we'll make a compress for you. You won't be afraid if I leave you alone for a few moments, will you? Lie quite still till I come back.

HANNELE

Was it really only the coat and hat, Sister? How silly of me.

SISTER MARTHA

Keep quite still. I'll be back directly. [*She goes out, but returns, as the courtyard is pitch dark.*] I'll put the candle outside in the courtyard for a minute. [*Shaking her finger tenderly at* HANNELE.] Now mind! Keep still!

[*She goes out.*

[*It is almost dark in the room. As soon as the* SISTER *has gone, the figure of* MATTERN, *the mason, appears at the foot of the bed. He has a drunken and unkempt look, tangled red hair, and a*

shabby old soldier's cap. In his left hand he holds his tools. Round his right wrist is a cord. He stares threateningly at Hannele *as if about to strike. A pale light envelopes the apparition and streams on to the bed.* Hannele *covers her face with her hands in terror. She writhes and moans piteously.*

The Apparition

[*In a hoarse and exasperated voice.*] Where are you? Loafin' agen, as usual, eh? I'll teach yer to skulk, you little devil, you. So you've been tellin' tales, have you? Tellin' the folks I ill-uses you, eh? I beats you, eh? Aren't you ashamed to tell such lies? You ain't no child of mine. Get up, you lazy baggage. I don't want to have nothin' more to do with you. I've half a mind to turn you out into the gutter. Get up and light the fire. D' ye hear? If I keeps you it's out o' charity. Now then, up with you? You won't, won't you? Well then, look out —

[Hannele, *with an effort, rises. Her eyes remain closed. She drags herself to the stove, opens the stove door, and falls senseless as* Sister Martha *returns with a lighted candle and a jug of water. The apparition vanishes.* Sister Martha *staggers, stares at* Hannele *as she lies among the ashes, and exclaims:*

Sister Martha

Saints alive! [*She puts down the candle and the jug, hastens to* Hannele, *and lifts her from the floor. Hearing her cry, the inmates of the almshouse rush in.*] I just left her for a moment

to fetch some water and she got out of bed. Here, Hedwig, give me a hand!

HANKE

You'd best be careful, or you'll hurt her.

PLESCHKE

It d — don't seem nat'ral to me, Sister. Someone must a bewitched the girl.

TULPE

That's what's wrong wi' her.

HANKE

[*Loudly.*] She won't last long, she won't.

SISTER MARTHA

[*When with* HEDWIG'S *assistance she has put* HANNELE *to bed again.*] That may be all very true, my good man, but you really must not excite the child.

HANKE

You're makin' quite a fuss about her, ain't you?

PLESCHKE

[*To* HANKE.] You're a bad lot you are — a reg'lar out an' out bad lot. Ain't you got sense enough to know — as — as — sick folk mustn't be excited?

HETE

[*Mimicking him.*] S — sick folk mustn't be excited —

SISTER MARTHA

I really must request you —

TULPE

Quite right, Sister.— You get out o' here!

HANKE

When we wants to go, we'll go, and not before.

HETE

The stable's good enough for the likes of *us*.

PLESCHKE

Don't you make no fuss — you'll find a place to sleep in, you will.

[*The inmates of the almshouse go out.*

HANNELE

[*Opens her eyes. She seems terrified.*] Has he gone?

SISTER MARTHA

They've all gone, Hannele. Did they frighten you?

HANNELE

[*Still terrified.*] Has father gone?

SISTER MARTHA

He hasn't been here.

HANNELE

Oh yes, he has, Sister!

SISTER MARTHA

You dreamed it, my dear.

HANNELE

[*Sighing deeply.*] Oh, dear Lord Jesus! Dear, dear Lord Jesus! Won't you please, please, take me away from here!

[*Her tone changes.*

"Oh, would He but come
And guide my way home!
I'm worn and I'm weary
No more can I roam!"

Yes, yes. I'm sure He will, Sister.

SISTER MARTHA

What, dear?

HANNELE

He's promised to take me to Him, Sister.

SISTER MARTHA

H'm.

[*Coughs.*

HANNELE

He's promised.

SISTER MARTHA

Who has promised?

HANNELE

[*Whispering mysteriously into the* SISTER's *ear.*] The dear Lord — Gottwald!

SISTER MARTHA

Get off to sleep again, Hannele, that's a good girl.

HANNELE

Isn't he handsome, Sister? Don't you think teacher's handsome? His name is Heinrich! — Did you know that? What a beautiful name! [*Fervently.*] Dear, good, kind Heinrich! Sister, when I grow up, we're going to be married!

"And when the priest had made them one,
Away they went together.
They rested on a snow-white bed
Within a darkened chamber."

He has such a lovely beard. [*Entranced.*] And, oh, his head's covered with such sweet white clover! — Hark! He's calling me! Don't you hear?

SISTER MARTHA

Do go to sleep, my pet. No one is calling.

HANNELE

It was the voice of — Jesus. Hark! He's calling me again. Oh, I hear Him quite plainly. "Hannele!" "Hannele!"— Let us go to Him!

SISTER MARTHA

When God calls He will find me ready!

HANNELE

[*Her head is now bathed in moonlight. She makes a gesture as though she were inhaling some sweet perfume.*] Don't you smell them, Sister?

SISTER MARTHA

No, Hannele.

HANNELE

Lilacs! [*Her ecstasy increases.*] Listen! Listen! [*A sweet voice is faintly heard in the far distance.*] Is that the angels singing? Don't you hear?

SISTER MARTHA

Yes, dear, I hear. But now you must turn round and have a good long sleep.

HANNELE

Can you sing that, too?

SISTER MARTHA

Sing what, my child?

HANNELE

"Sleep, darling, sleep!"

SISTER MARTHA

Would you like me to?

HANNELE

[*Lies back and strokes the* SISTER'S *hand.*]
Mother, mother! Sing to me!

SISTER MARTHA

[*Extinguishes the light, bends over the bed, and softly intones the following verses to the accompaniment of distant music:*]

"Sleep, darling, sleep!
In the garden goes a sheep.

[*She sings the rest in darkness.*

A little lamb with thee shall play,
From dawn to sunset, all the day.
Sleep, darling, sleep!"

[*Twilight fills the room.* SISTER MARTHA *has gone. The pale and ghostly form of a woman appears and seats itself on the side of the bed. She is slightly bent and seems to rest on her thin bare arms. Her feet are bare. Her long white locks stream over her shoulders and upon the bed. Her face seems worn and wasted. Her sunken eyes, though closed, seem fixed on* HANNELE. *Her voice sounds as the voice of one speaking in her sleep. Before she speaks, her lips are seen to move, as though it cost her a great effort to get the words out. She is prematurely aged. Her cheeks are hollow, and she is clad in miserable clothes.*

THE FEMALE APPARITION

Hannele!

HANNELE

[*Her eyes, also, are closed.*] Mother, dearest mother! Is it you?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

It is I.— I have washed the feet of my Saviour with my tears, and I have dried them with my hair.

HANNELE

Do you bring me good tidings?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

Yes!

HANNELE

Have you come far?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

Hundreds of thousands of miles, through the night!

HANNELE

How strange you look, mother!

THE FEMALE APPARITION

As the children of earth look, so I look!

HANNELE

There are buttercups and daisies on your lips. Your voice rings out like music.

THE FEMALE APPARITION

It is no true ring, my child.

HANNELE

Mother, dear mother, your beauty dazzles me!

THE FEMALE APPARITION

The angels in heaven are a thousandfold more radiant!

HANNELE

Why are you not like them?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

I suffered for your sake.

HANNELE

Mother mine, won't you stay with me?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

[*Rising.*] I cannot stay!

HANNELE

Is it beautiful where you have come from?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

There the wide meadows are sheltered from the wind and storm and hail. God shields them.

HANNELE

Can you rest there when you are tired?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

Yes!

HANNELE

Can you get food to eat there, when you are hungry?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

There is meat and fruit for all who hunger, and golden wine for those who thirst.

[*She shrinks away.*

HANNELE

Are you going, mother?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

God calls me!

HANNELE

Does He call loudly?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

He calls *me* loudly!

HANNELE

My heart is parched within me, mother!

THE FEMALE APPARITION

God will cool it with roses and with lilies.

HANNELE

Mother, will God redeem me?

THE FEMALE APPARITION

Do you know this flower I hold here in my hand?

HANNELE

It's golden sesame! * The key of heaven!

THE FEMALE APPARITION

[*Puts it into* HANNELE's *hand.*] Take it and keep it as God's pledge. Farewell!

HANNELE

Mother! Mother, don't leave me!

THE FEMALE APPARITION

[*Shrinks away.*] A little while and ye shall not see me, and again a little while and ye shall see me.

HANNELE

I'm afraid!

THE FEMALE APPARITION

[*Shrinking still farther away.*] Even as the snowdrifts on the hills are swept away by the winds, so shall thy troubles be lifted from thee.

* In the German the flower is *Himmelschlüssel,* that is "Key of heaven," but in English, cowslip. "Sesame" seems more appropriate and suggestive.—C. H. M.

Hannele

Don't go!

The Female Apparition

The Children of Heaven are as lightnings in the Night. Sleep!

[*The room gradually grows dark. Pretty voices of young children are heard singing the second verse of "Sleep, darling, sleep."*

"Sleep, darling, sleep!
Bright guests their vigils keep —

[*A gold-green light suddenly floods the room. Three radiant* Angels, *crowned with roses, and having the forms of beautiful winged youths, appear and take up the song. In their hands they hold music.* The Female Apparition *has vanished.*

The guests who guard thee thro' the night
Are angels from the realms of Light.
Sleep, darling, sleep!"

Hannele

[*Opens her eyes and gazes rapturously at the* Angels.] Angels! [*Her joy and her amazement grow, but she seems still in doubt.*] Angels!! [*Triumphantly.*] Angels!!!

[*Short pause. Then the* Angels *sing the following strophes from the music in their hands.*

First Angel

The sunlight that gleamed on the mountains
Gave nothing to thee of its gold.
The wavering green of the valleys
For thee ne'er its wealth would unfold.

SECOND ANGEL

The life-giving grain as it ripened
Thy craving for bread did not heed.
The kine as they grazed in the meadows
Denied thee their milk in thy need.

THIRD ANGEL

The buds and the blossoms around thee,
Whose sweetness delighted the day,
Their glory of azure and purple
Ne'er shed on the shards of thy way.

[*Brief pause.*]

FIRST ANGEL

A heavenly greeting we bring thee
From out of the darkness of space,
And the tips of our radiant pinions
Are touched with God's grace.

SECOND ANGEL

In the hem of our raiment we bear thee
The fragrance and joy of the Spring.
The rose of the morn, newly born,
On our lips we bring.

THIRD ANGEL

The mystic, green glow of our Home-land
Illumines our feet in the skies.
The spires of The City Eternal
Shine deep in our eyes.

THE FIRST ACT ENDS

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is as it was before the appearance of the ANGELS.

THE DEACONESS (SISTER MARTHA) *sits beside* HANNELE'S *bed. She lights the candle again and* HANNELE *awakes. Her inward rapture is still shown in the expression of her face. As soon as she recognises* SISTER MARTHA *she breaks into joyous talk.*

HANNELE

Sister! Sister Martha! Do you know who has been here? Angels! Angels, Sister!

SISTER MARTHA

Aha! You're wide awake again.

HANNELE

Yes, yes. Only think of it. [*Impulsively.*] Angels! Angels! Real angels, from heaven, Sister Martha, with great, big wings!

SISTER MARTHA

What sweet dreams you must have had, dear.

HANNELE

Why do you speak of dreams? Look, look! See what I have in my hand!

[*She holds out an imaginary flower to her.*

SISTER MARTHA

What is it, dearest?

HANNELE

Can't you see?

SISTER MARTHA

H'm.

HANNELE

Look at it, Sister. Only look!

SISTER MARTHA

I see, dear.

HANNELE

Smell how sweet it is!

SISTER MARTHA

[*Pretending to smell.*] Beautiful!

HANNELE

Take care, take care. You'll crush it.

SISTER MARTHA

Oh, no, I mustn't do that, my dear. What do you call this wonderful flower?

HANNELE

Why, golden sesame, of course!

SISTER MARTHA

Oh!

HANNELE

Of course it is. Can't you see? Bring the light here. Quick! Quick!

SISTER MARTHA

Ah! Now I see.

HANNELE

Isn't it beautiful?

SISTER MARTHA

Yes, yes. But you mustn't talk so much, my

child. You must keep quite, quite still, or else the doctor will be angry. Now you must take the medicine he sent for you.

HANNELE

Oh, Sister, why will you worry so much about me? You don't know what has happened — do you, now? Who do you think it was gave me this lovely golden sesame? Guess, guess.— What's sesame for? Don't you know, Sister?

SISTER MARTHA

Ssh! You can tell me all about it in the morning, when you are strong, and bright, and well again.

HANNELE

I *am* well.

[*She tries to rise and puts her feet out of bed.*

SISTER MARTHA

You mustn't do that, Hannele dear.

HANNELE

[*Waving her away, gets out of bed and walks a few steps.*] Please — please do leave me alone. I must go away — away. [*She starts and stares fixedly at something.*] Oh, dear Lord Jesus!

[*The figure of an* ANGEL, *clad in black and with black wings, appears. The* ANGEL *is tall, majestic and beautiful. In his hands he holds a long, wavy sword, the hilt of which is wrapped in crape. The* ANGEL *is seated near the stove. He is silent and serious. He gazes steadily and calmly at* HANNELE. *A supernatural white light fills the room.*

Who are you?

[*Pause.*]

Are you an angel? [*No answer.*] Is it me you want? [*No answer.*] I am Hannele Mattern. Have you come for *me?* [*Again no answer.*]

[*During this incident,* Sister Martha *has stood looking on, perplexed and thoughtful, with folded hands. She slowly passes out of the room.*

Has God made you dumb? Are you an angel? [*No answer.*] Are you one of God's good angels? [*No answer.*] Will you be kind to me? [*No answer.*] Are you an enemy? [*No answer.*] Why have you hidden that sword in the folds of your dress? [*Silence.*] I'm so cold, so cold. Your look chills me. You're icy cold. [*Still silence.*] Who are you?

[*No answer. Terror suddenly overmasters her. She screams and turns as if appealing for help to someone behind her.*

Mother! Mother!

[*A figure, dressed like the* Deaconess, *but younger and more beautiful, and with great white wings, enters the room.* Hannele *hurries toward the figure, and clutches at her hand.*

Mother, mother! There's someone in the room!

Deaconess

Where?

Hannele

There — there!

Deaconess

Why do you tremble so?

Hannele

I'm afraid.

DEACONESS

Fear nothing. I am with you.

HANNELE

My teeth are chattering. I can't *help* it, mother! He terrifies me!

DEACONESS

Fear not, my child. He is your friend.

HANNELE

Who is it, mother?

DEACONESS

Do you not know him?

HANNELE

Who is he?

DEACONESS

He is Death!

HANNELE

Death! [*She stares fixedly and fearfully at the* ANGEL *for a moment.*] Must it — must it be?

DEACONESS

Death is the gate, Hannele!

HANNELE

Is there no other, mother dear?

DEACONESS

There is no other.

HANNELE

Will you be cruel to me, Death? — He won't answer! Why won't he answer any of my questions, mother?

DEACONESS

The voice of God has answered you already.

HANNELE

Oh, dear Lord God, I have so often longed for this. But now — now I am afraid!

DEACONESS

Get ready, Hannele.

HANNELE

For death, mother?

DEACONESS

For death.

HANNELE

[*Timidly, after a pause.*] Shall I have to wear these ragged clothes, when they put me into the coffin?

DEACONESS

God will clothe you.

[*She produces a small silver bell and rings it. In response there enters — silently, like all the following apparitions — a little humpbacked* VILLAGE TAILOR, *carrying on his arm a bridal dress, a veil and a wreath. In one hand he has a pair of crystal slippers. He has a comical, see-saw gait, bows silently to the* ANGEL *and the* DEACONESS, *and lastly, and obsequiously, to* HANNELE.

THE VILLAGE TAILOR

[*Bobbing and bowing.*] Johanna Katherina Mattern, your most obedient. [*Clears his throat.*] Your father, his Excellency the Count, has done me the honour of ordering this bridal robe for you.

DEACONESS

[*Takes the dress from the* TAILOR, *and attires*

Hannele.] I will help you to put it on, Hannele.

Hannele

[*Joyfully.*] Oh, how it rustles.

Deaconess

It's white silk, Hannele.

Hannele

Won't the people be astonished to see me so beautifully dressed in my coffin!

The Village Tailor

Johanna Katherina Mattern — [*He clears his throat.*] The village is full of it. [*He clears his throat.*] It's full of the good luck your death is bringing you. [*Clears his throat.*] Your father, his Excellency the Count — [*coughs*] has just been talking to the Burgomaster about it.

Deaconess

[*Puts wreath on* Hannele's *head.*] Lift up your head, you heavenly bride!

Hannele

[*Trembling with childish pleasure.*] Oh, Sister Martha, I'm so glad I am to die. [*Breaking off suddenly and doubtfully.*] You *are* Sister Martha, are you not?

Deaconess

Yes, my child.

Hannele

No, no. You're not Sister Martha. You are my mother!

Deaconess

Yes.

HANNELE

Are you both of them?

DEACONESS

The children of heaven are all one in God.

THE VILLAGE TAILOR

If I may say so, Princess Hannele — [*he kneels to put on the slippers*] these slippers are the smallest in the land. Hedwig, and Agnes, and Liese, and Martha, and Minna, and Anna, and Käthe, and Gretchen, and the rest of them all have such very large feet. [*He puts on the slippers.*] But they fit you — they fit you! We've found the bride! Princess Hannele's feet are the smallest! — Is there anything else I can do for you? [*Bows and scrapes.*] Your servant, Princess. Your servant. [*He goes.*

HANNELE

Who would have dreamed it, mother?

DEACONESS

Now you need not take any more of that nasty physic.

HANNELE

No.

DEACONESS

Soon you will be as bright and blithe as a lark, now, darling.

HANNELE

Oh, yes!

DEACONESS

Come, dear, and lie down on your death-bed.

[*She takes* HANNELE *by the hand, leads her gently to the bed and waits while* HANNELE *lies down.*

HANNELE

Now I'll soon know what death is, won't I?

DEACONESS

You will, Hannele.

HANNELE

[*Lying on her back and playing with an imaginary flower.*] I have a pledge here!

DEACONESS

Press it closely to your breast.

HANNELE

[*Growing frightened again and glancing at the* ANGEL.] Must it — must it be?

DEACONESS

It must.

[*Sounds of a funeral march heard in the remote distance.*

HANNELE

[*Listening.*] That's Master Seyfried and the musicians announcing the funeral.

[*The* ANGEL *rises.*

Oh, he's getting up!

[*The storm outside gains strength. The* ANGEL *draws nearer to* HANNELE.

Sister! Mother! He's coming to me! Where are you? I can't see you! [*Appealing to the* ANGEL.] Make haste, thou dark and silent spirit! [*Speaking as though a heavy weight oppressed her.*] He's pressing me down! [*The* ANGEL *solemnly lifts up his sword.*] He'll crush me to pieces! [*With anguish.*] Help, Sister, help!

[*The* DEACONESS *steps majestically between*

the Angel *and* Hannele, *and lays her hands protectingly on the child's heart. She speaks loftily, impressively and with authority.*

Deaconess

He dare not. I lay my consecrated hands upon thy heart.

[*The dark* Angel *vanishes. Silence.*

[*The* Deaconess *lapses into meditation and her lips move as if in prayer. The sound of the funeral march has continued through this scene. A noise as of many tramping feet is heard. The form of the schoolmaster,* Gottwald, *appears in the central doorway. The funeral march ceases.* Gottwald *is dressed in mourning and bears a bunch of lovely bluebells in his hand. He takes off his hat reverently, and on entering makes a gesture as though he would have silence. Behind him are ranged his pupils — boys and girls, in Sunday clothes. At the gesture of the* Schoolmaster, *they stop chattering, and seem afraid to cross the threshold.* Gottwald *approaches the* Deaconess *with a radiant look upon his face.*

Gottwald

Good day, Sister Martha.

Deaconess

Good day, Teacher Gottwald.

Gottwald

[*Shakes his head sadly as he looks at* Hannele.] Poor little maid.

DEACONESS

Why are you so sad, Teacher Gottwald?

GOTTWALD

Is she not dead?

DEACONESS

Is that a thing to grieve over? She has found peace at last. I envy her.

GOTTWALD

[*Sighing.*] Ay, she is free from care and sorrow now. It is all for the best.

DEACONESS

[*Looking steadfastly at* HANNELE.] How fair she seems.

GOTTWALD

Yes, very fair. Death seems to have clothed her with beauty.

DEACONESS

God has made her beautiful, because she loved Him.

GOTTWALD

Yes, she was always good and pious.

[*Sighs heavily, opens his hymn book, and peers into it sadly.*

DEACONESS

[*Peering into the same hymn book.*] We should not repine. We must be patient.

GOTTWALD

And yet my heart is heavy.

DEACONESS

You do not mourn to know that she is saved?

GOTTWALD

I mourn to think that two fair flowers have withered.

DEACONESS

I do not understand you.

GOTTWALD

I have two faded violets in this book. How like they are to the dead eyes of my poor little Hannele.

DEACONESS

They will grow bright and blue again in Heaven.

GOTTWALD

Oh, Lord, how long must we still wander in this vale of tears! [*His tone changes abruptly. He becomes bustling and business-like. Produces a hymn book.*] I thought it would be a good idea to sing the first hymn here — in the house — "Jesus, my Guide —"

DEACONESS

It is a beautiful hymn and Hannele Mattern was a pious child.

GOTTWALD

And then, you know, when we get to the churchyard, we can sing, "Now lettest Thou thy servant." [*He turns to the school children and addresses them.*] Hymn No. 62! [*Intones hymn, slowly beating time.*] "Now let-test-Thou-thy-servant, De-pa-ar-art-in-peace —" [*The children chime in.*] Children, have you all warm clothes on? It will be cold out yonder in the churchyard. Come in and take one last look at our poor Hannele.

[*The children enter and range themselves about the bed.*

See how beautiful death has made the child. Once she was clad in rags. Now she wears silken raiment. She went barefooted once. Now she has crystal slippers on her feet. Ere very long she will be taken to a house all built of gold, where she will never more know thirst or hunger.

Do you remember how you used to mock at her and call her Princess Rag-Tag? — Now she is going away from us to be a real princess in Heaven. If any of you have offended her, now is the time to beg for her forgiveness. If you do not, she will tell her Heavenly Father how unkind you were to her, and it will go hard with you.

A Child

[*Stepping forward.*] Dear Princess Hannele, please, please forgive me and don't tell God that I used to call you Princess Rag-Tag.

All The Children

[*Together.*] We are all very, very sorry.

Gottwald

That's right, children. Hannele will forgive you. Now, boys and girls, go inside and wait till I join you.

Deaconess

Come into the back room with me and I will tell you what you must all do if you want to join the bright angels some day, like Hannele.

[*She goes out.* The Children *follow. The door closes.*

Gottwald

[*Alone with* Hannele. *He lays his flowers at her feet.*] My dear, dear Hannele, here are the violets I have brought you. [*Kneels by the bed-*

side. His voice trembles.] Do not forget me in your new felicity. [*He sobs and lays his head against the folds of her dress.*] My heart is breaking at the thought of parting from you.

[*Voices are heard without.* Gottwald *rises and lays a covering over* Hannele. *Two aging women, dressed as if for a funeral, and with handkerchiefs and yellow-edged hymn books in their hands, push their way into the room.*

First Woman

[*Glancing round.*] We're ahead of them all.

Second Woman

No, we ain't. There's the Teacher. Good day, Teacher.

Gottwald

Good day.

First Woman

You're takin' it to heart, Teacher. Well, well, I allow she was a sweet child. My, what a busy little thing she was, to be sure.

Second Woman

Say, Teacher, we've heard as how she killed herself. It ain't true, is it?

Third Woman

[*Appears.*] 'T'ud be a mortal sin!

Second Woman

Ay, that it would.

Third Woman

The minister, *he* says, there ain't no pardon for it.

GOTTWALD

The Saviour said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

FOURTH WOMAN

[*Enters.*] Dear, dear, what weather we're havin'. We'll all be froze, I guess, before we've done. I hope the parson won't keep us long in the churchyard. The snow's a foot deep in the churchyard.

FIFTH WOMAN

[*Enters.*] Th' parson won't have no prayers read over her. He says as how consecrated ground ain't no place for the likes er her.

PLESCHKE

[*Enters.*] Ha' yer heard the news? A grand stranger's bin to see the parson. He says that Mattern's Hannele's a saint.

HANKE

[*Hurrying in.*] They're bringin' her a crystal coffin.

SEVERAL VOICES

[*Together.*] A crystal coffin!

HANKE

Reckon it'll cost a pretty sum.

SEVERAL VOICES

[*Together.*] A crystal coffin!

SEIDEL

[*Enters.*] There's strange goin's on down in the village. An angel's bin there — an angel as big's a poplar, they do say. An' there's more of 'em down at th' blacksmith's — little uns, they be,

no bigger nor babies. [*Looking at* Hannele.] She don't look like a beggar, she don't.

Several Voices

[*Scattered.*] No, she don't look like a beggar —

A crystal coffin! — Did you ever hear the like! — And angels in the village!

[Four Youths *clad in white enter, bearing a crystal coffin, which they put down close to* Hannele's *bed. They whisper to each other excitedly and curiously.*

Gottwald

[*Slightly raising the cloth.*] Would you like to have a look at the dead child?

First Woman

[*Peeping at* Hannele.] Just look at her hair. Why, if it ain't shinin' just like gold.

Gottwald

[*Drawing the cloth completely from the body which is flooded with a pale light.*] Have you seen her silk dress and crystal slippers?

[*All utter exclamations of surprise, and draw back.*

Several Voices

[*Confusedly.*] Lord, how beautiful! — Why, that ain't our Hannele! — That can't be Mattern's Hannele! — Well, if it ain't wonderful!

Pleschke

She's a saint, sure enough.

[*The* Four Youths *lay* Hannele *reverently in the crystal coffin.*

HANKE

I told you there wouldn't be no buryin' for *her.*

FIRST WOMAN

I reckon they'll put her into the church.

SECOND WOMAN

I don't believe the girl's dead at all. She looks too lifelike for that.

PLESCHKE

G — gi' me — gi' me — a feather.— We'll soon see if she's dead.— Just gi' me a feather — [*They give him a feather. He holds it before her lips.*] It don't stir! The girl's dead, sure enough, she is. There ain't no life left in her.

THIRD WOMAN

I'd kinder like to give her this bit o' rosemary. [*She puts a sprig into the coffin.*

FOURTH WOMAN

She can have my lavender, too.

FIFTH WOMAN

Why, where's Mattern?

FIRST WOMAN

Ay, where's Mattern?

SECOND WOMAN

Where he allus is, drinkin' down at th' inn.

FIRST WOMAN

May be he don't know what's happened?

SECOND WOMAN

He don't know nothin' when he's full o' drink.

PLESCHKE

Wot? Ain't no one told him there's a dead body in the house?

THIRD WOMAN

He might er found that out for hisself.

FOURTH WOMAN

I'm not accusin' anyone, I ain't. But it *do* seem odd the man who killed the child, as you might say, shouldn't know nothin' about it.

SEIDEL

That's what I say, and every one in th' village 'ud say the same. Why, she's got a bruise on her as big as my fist.

FIFTH WOMAN

He's the devil's own child, is Mattern.

SEIDEL

I saw that there bruise when I was helpin' to put her to bed. I tell yer, it was as big as my fist. That's what settled her business.

FIRST WOMAN

He's the man as done it.

ALL

[*Whispering angrily to one another.*] That's what he is.

SECOND WOMAN

I call him a murderer.

ALL

He's a murderer, a murderer!

[*The drunken voice of* MATTERN, *the mason, is heard without.*

MATTERN

[*Without.*] Lemme in, d' ye hear? Lemme in! I ain't done no harm to nobody. [*He appears in the doorway and bawls:*] Where are you hidin', you good-for-nothin' hussy? [*He staggers.*] I'll give you till I count five. Then look out. Now then. One — two — three — and one makes — Come out, damn you, you hussy. What d' ye mean by makin' me lose my temper? Lemme get a sight of you, that's all, and I'll break every bone in your body. [*He stumbles, recovers and stares stupidly at the silent bystanders.*] What are you starin' at me for? [*No answer.*] What d' ye want? Devil take you all. I ain't done nothin' to the girl. Come out, d' ye hear? And mighty quick about it, too. [*He chuckles to himself.*] I know what I'm about, if I *have* had a drop too much. What, you ain't gone yet — [*Savagely.*] Don't stand there glarin' at me or I'll —

[A man wearing a long, shabby, brown robe enters. He is about thirty years old. His hair is long and dark. His face is the face of the schoolmaster, GOTTWALD. *In his left hand he holds a soft hat. He has sandals on his feet. He seems weary and travel-stained. He interrupts the mason by laying his hand gently on his arm.* MATTERN *turns round roughly. The stranger looks him steadily and calmly in the face.*

THE STRANGER

[*Gently.*] Mattern, the mason, God's peace be with thee.

MATTERN

Where do *you* come from? What do you want?

THE STRANGER

[*Appealing.*] My feet are weary and blood-stained. Give me water wherewith to wash them. The burning sun has parched my tongue. Give me wine, wherewith to cool it. No food has passed my lips since early morn. Give me bread, wherewith to still my hunger.

MATTERN

It's none of my business. If you'd been working, like an honest man, instead o' trampin' up and down the country roads, you'd be all right. *I* have to work for my livin'.

THE STRANGER

I am a workman.

MATTERN

You're a vagabond, you are. Honest workmen don't starve.

THE STRANGER

For *my* work no man pays me.

MATTERN

You're a vagabond.

THE STRANGER

[*Faintly, submissively, but pressingly.*] I am a physician. Hast thou not need of me?

MATTERN

Not I. I'm not sick. No doctors for me.

THE STRANGER

[*His voice trembling with emotion.*] Mattern,

the mason, bethink thee! Though thou hast denied me water, I will heal thee. Though thou hast refused me bread, yet I can make thee well. God is my witness.

MATTERN

Be off with you, d' ye hear? Be off. My bones are sound. I don't want nothin' to do with doctors. Will you clear out?

THE STRANGER

Mattern, the mason, bethink thee well. I will wash thy feet. I will give thee wine. Thou shalt have sweet, white bread to eat. Set thy foot upon my head, and I will still heal thee, as God liveth.

MATTERN

You won't go, won't you, eh? I'll have to throw you out?

THE STRANGER

[*Impressively.*] Mattern, the mason, dost thou not know what lies within this house?

MATTERN

There ain't nothin' lyin' here but what belongs to the place, 'ceptin' you. Off you go, damn you!

THE STRANGER

[*Simply.*] Thy daughter lies here, sick.

MATTERN

She don't want no doctors to cure her complaint. She's lazy. That's wot's the matter with her. I'll cure her, and mighty quick, too, if she don't stop skulkin'.

THE STRANGER

[*Loftily.*] Mattern, the mason, I come to thee as a messenger.

MATTERN

A messenger? Who sent you, eh?

THE STRANGER

I come from the Father, and I go unto the Father. What hast thou done with His child?

MATTERN

P'raps you know where she's hidin' herself better than I do. What are His children to me? He don't seem to trouble Himself much about them.

THE STRANGER

[*Directly.*] There is one dead within these walls.

MATTERN

[*Sees* HANNELE, *approaches the coffin silently, and looks in, muttering.*] Where the devil did she get all them fine clothes and that ere crystal coffin? [*The coffin-bearers whisper together angrily, "Murderer!" "Murderer!"* MATTERN, *softly and stammering:*] I — n-never did ye n-no harm. I was kind to you, I was. I didn't deny you nothin'— [*Brutally, to the* STRANGER.] Wot d' yer want? Come, speak out and ha' done with it? 'Tain't no business of mine.

THE STRANGER

Mattern, the mason, hast thou nothing to say to me? [*The coffin-bearers grow more and more excited, and frequent exclamations of "Murderer!" "Murderer!" are heard.*] Hast thou not sinned? Hast thou never dragged her from her

sleep at night and beaten her till she grew faint with pain and anguish?

MATTERN

[*Frenzied with excitement.*] May Heaven strike me dead if I have!

[*Faint blue lightning and distant thunder.*

ALL

[*Scattered voices.*] It's thundering! — Thunder in mid-winter! — He's perjured himself! — The murderer's perjured himself!

THE STRANGER

[*Gently and persuasively.*] Hast thou still nothing to confess, Mattern?

MATTERN

[*Panic-struck.*] Those whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth. That's what I did to the girl. I treated her as though she was my own child, I did.

THE WOMEN

[*Rushing at him.*] Murderer! Murderer!

MATTERN

She lied to me and cheated me.

THE STRANGER

Is this the truth?

MATTERN

So help me God!

[*The golden sesame appears in* HANNELE'S *clasped hands. A mystic greenish-yellow light streams from it. The sight dismays* MATTERN, *who recoils in terror.*

THE STRANGER

Mattern, the mason, thou hast lied to me.

ALL

[*Scattered voices.*] A miracle! A miracle!

PLESCHKE

The girl's a saint, sure. He's perjured hisself, he has.

MATTERN

[*Shouting.*] I'll go hang myself!

[*He presses his hands to his temples and goes.*

THE STRANGER

[*Advances to the coffin and turns to the bystanders, who draw back in awe of his now noble and imposing form.*] Be not afraid! [*He stops and presses* HANNELE's *hand. Then in a gentle tone.*] The maiden is not dead. She sleepeth. [*Earnestly.*] Johanna Mattern!

[*A golden-green light steals into the room.* HANNELE *opens her eyes and, with the help of* THE STRANGER's *hand, rises, not yet daring to fix her eyes on him. She leaves the coffin and sinks upon her knees before* THE STRANGER. *The bystanders flee in consternation.* THE STRANGER *and* HANNELE *remain alone.* THE STRANGER's *shabby gown falls from his shoulders. Beneath it is a robe of white and gold.*

THE STRANGER

[*Tenderly.*] Hannele!

HANNELE

[*With rapture, bending her head low.*] 'Tis he!

THE STRANGER

Dost thou know me?

HANNELE

I have waited for thee.

THE STRANGER

Canst thou name my name?

HANNELE

[*Trembling with awe.*] Holy! Holy! Holy!

THE STRANGER

I know thy sorrow and thy pain.

HANNELE

I have longed for thy coming.

THE STRANGER

Arise!

HANNELE

Thy dress is spotless. I am ashamed.

THE STRANGER

[*Laying his right hand on* HANNELE's *head.*] Thy shame I take from thee. [*He lifts her face gently and touches her eyelids.*] I fill thine eyes with everlasting light. Thy soul shall be all sunshine. Eternal brightness shall be thine, from dawn till eve and then till dawn again. Receive all radiant things, and feast thine eyes on all the glories of the deep blue sea and azure sky and fair green trees, forever and forever. [*He touches her ears.*] Let thine ears be opened to the music of the millions upon millions of God's angels.

[*He touches her lips.*] Thus do I loose thy stammering tongue and quicken it with the life of thine own soul and my soul, and the soul of God Almighty.

[Hannele, *trembling convulsively with rapture, tries to rise, but cannot. She sobs and buries her head in* The Stranger's *robe.*

With these thy tears I cleanse thee from the dust and stain of earth. I will raise thee high above the stars of God.

[The Stranger *lays his hand on the child's head and speaks the lines following to the accompanying strains of soft music. As he speaks, the forms of many angels appear, crowding through the doorway. Some are tall, some short. Some are radiant winged boys and girls. They swing incense-censers and strew flowers, and spread rich stuffs on the floor.*

The Stranger

The Realm of Righteousness is filled with light and joy.
God's everlasting peace reigns there without alloy.

[*Harps are heard, at first played softly, then gradually swelling louder and louder.*

Its mansions are marble, its roofs are of gold,
Through its rivulets ripple wines ruddy and old.
In its silver-white streets blow the lily and rose,
In its steeples the chiming of joy-bells grows.
The beautiful butterflies frolic and play
On its ramparts, rich-robed in the mosses of May.

Swans, twelve, soft as snow, ring them round in the sky,
And their wings thrill the air with sweet sounds as they fly.
And louder and louder the symphonies swell
Till their resonance reaches from heav'n to hell.
Forever and ever, through æons unending,
With music majestic their progress attending,
They soar above Zion and meadow and sea,
And their path is made lambent with mystery.
The blessèd below, in the regions of Light,
Wander on, hand in hand, and rejoice in their flight.
In the depths of the radiant, the ruby-red waves,
Swan dives down after swan, as its plumage it laves.
So they wash themselves clean in the clear, deep red
Of the blood that the Lord, their dear Saviour, had shed,
And they pass from the glory of flood and of foam,
To the rest and the bliss of their heavenly home.

[The Stranger *turns to the* Angels, *who have ended their work. With timid joy they draw near and form a semi-circle round* Hannele *and* The Stranger.

Bring hither finest linen, children mine —
My fair, my pretty turtle-doves, come hither.
Surround her weak and wasted little frame
With comfort and with warmth, to keep her free
From frost and fever, pain and weary woe.
Be tender with her. Shield her from rude touch,
And bear her swiftly up, on pinions light.
Above the waving grasses of the lea,

Beyond the shimmering wastes of moonlit space
Beyond the meads and groves of Paradise,
Into the cool and shade of boundless peace.
Then, while she rests upon her silken bed,
Prepare for her, in alabaster bath,
Water from mountain brook, and purple wine, and
milk of antelope,
To wash away the stain of earthly ill!
From off the bushes break the budding sprays,
Lilac and jessamine, with dew bent low,
And let their moisture from the petals flow
Softly upon her, as the showers in May.
Take linen rare and fine, to dry her limbs
With loving hands, as ye would lily-leaves.
From jewell'd chalices pour the reviving wine,
Pressed from the patient heart of fragrant fruit.

. . . . . .

Delight her lips with sweets, her heart delight
With all the dazzling splendours of the morn.
Enchant her eyes with stately palaces.
Let humming-birds, in iris hues arrayed,
From walls of malachite flash gold and green.
Beneath her feet spread velvets, richly wrought,
And strew her path with daffodils and tulips.
To fan her cheek let palms in cadence sway
And make her life unceasing holiday.
Where the red poppies rear their beauteous heads
And happy children dance to meet the day,
Bid her repose, free now from tear and sigh,
And witch her soul with gentle harmony.

THE ANGELS

[*Sing in chorus.*

We bear thee away to the Heavenly Rest,
Lullaby, into the Land of the Blest,
Lullaby, into the Land of the Blest!

[*The stage grows gradually dark, as the* Angels *sing. Out of the darkness the sound of their song is heard more and more faintly. Then the stage grows light. The interior of the almshouse is seen, exactly as before the first apparition.* Hannele — *a poor, sick child, once more lies on the bed.* Doctor Wachler *bends over her, with a stethoscope. The* Deaconess (Sister Martha) *stands by, watching anxiously, and holding a candle in her hand. The* Angels' *song ceases.*

THE SUNKEN BELL

CHARACTERS

HEINRICH, *a bell-founder*

MAGDA, *his wife*

TWO CHILDREN, *boys, aged 5 and 9*

THE VICAR

THE SCHOOLMASTER

THE BARBER

OLD WITTIKIN

RAUTENDELEIN, *an elfin creature*

THE NICKELMANN, *an elemental spirit*

THE WOOD-SPRITE

FOUR ELVES

TROLDS AND DWARFS

VILLAGERS

The scenes are laid in the mountains and in a village below.

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *A fir-clad glade in the mountains. To the left, in the background, beneath an overhanging rock, a hut. An old well to the right in the foreground.*

RAUTENDELEIN *is seated on the edge of the well, combing her thick golden locks and addressing a bee which she is trying to drive away. In one hand she has a mirror.*

RAUTENDELEIN

Thou buzzing, golden wight — whence com'st thou here?
Thou sipper of sweets, thou little wax-maker!
Nay! Tease me not, thou sun-born good-for-naught!
Dost hear? . . . Begone! . . . 'Tis time I combed my hair
With Granny's golden comb. Should I delay,
She'll scold me when she comes. Begone, I say!
What? . . . Loit'ring still? . . . Away — away with thee!
Am I a rose bush? . . . Are my lips a rose?
Off to the wood with thee, beyond the brook!
There, there, my pretty bee, bloom cowslips fair,
And crocuses, and violets — thou canst suck
Thy fill of them. Dost think I jest? No. No.
Quick! Get thee home. Thou'rt not in favour here.

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Thou knowest Granny's cast a spell on thee
For furnishing the Church with altar-lights.
Come! Must I speak again? Go not too far!
Hey! . . . Chimney! Puff some smoke across the glade,
To drive away this naughty, wilful bee.
Ho! Gander! Hither! Hither! . . . Hurry! Hurry!
Away! Away! [*Bee flies off.*] . . . At last! . . .

[Rautendelein *combs her hair quietly for a moment or two. Then, leaning over the well, she calls down.*

Hey! Nickelmann!

[*Pause.*]

He does not hear me. Well — I'll sing to myself.
Where do I come from? . . . Whither go?
Tell me — I long to know!
Did I grow as the birds of the woodland gay?
Am I a fay?
Who asks the sweet flower
That blooms in the dell,
And brightens the bower,
Its tale to tell?
Yet, oft, as I sit by my well, alone,
I sigh for the mother I ne'er have known.
But my weird I must dree —
And I'm fair to see —
A golden-haired maid of the forest free!

[*Pause. She calls.*

Hey! Nickelmann! Come up! 'Tis lonely here.
Granny's gone gathering fir-apples. I'm dull! . . .
Wilt keep me company and tell me tales?
Why then, to-night, perhaps, as a reward . . .
I'll creep into some farmer's yard and steal

A big, black cock for thee! . . . Ah, here he comes
The silver bubbles to the surface mount!
If he should bob up now, the glass he'd break,
That such bright answer to my nod doth make.
[*Admiring her reflection in the well.*
Godden' to thee, my sweet maid o' the well!
Thy name? . . . Rautendelein? . . . Indeed! I see —
Thou'rt jealous of my beauty. Look at me.
For I, not thou, Rautendelein should be.
What didst thou answer? Didst thou dare to point
Thy finger at thy soft twin-breasts? . . . Nay, nay —
I'm fairer; fair as Freya. Not for naught
My hair was spun out of the sunbeams red,
To shine, in golden glory, even as the sun
Shines up at us, at noon, from out a lake.
Aha! Thou spread'st thy tresses, like a net,
All fiery-scarlet, set to catch the fishes!
Thou poor, vain, foolish trull . . . There! Catch this stone.
[*Throwing pebble down the well and disturbing the reflection.*
Thy hour is ended. Now — I'm fair alone!
[*Calling.*
Ho! Nickelmann! Come — help me pass the time!
[The Nickelmann, *a water-spirit, half emerges from the well, and flops over the edge. He is streaming with water. Weeds cling to his head. He snorts like a seal, and his eyes blink as if the daylight hurt them.*
He's here! . . . Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! How dreadfully plain

He is! . . . Didst thou not hear me call! Dear, dear —
It makes one's flesh creep but to know him near!

THE NICKELMANN

[*Croaking.*

Brekekekex!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Mocking.*

Brekekekex! Ay, ay —
It smells of springtide. Well, is that so strange?
Why — every lizard, mole, and worm, and mouse —
The veriest water-rat — had scented that.
The quail, the hare, the trout, the fly, the weeds,
Had told thee Spring was here.

THE NICKELMANN

[*Touchily.*

Brekekekex!
Be not too nosey-wise. Dost understand?
Thou ape, thou midge, thou tomtit, irk me not!
I say, beware! . . . So, Quorax! Quack! Quack! Quack!

RAUTENDELEIN

If Master Uncle's cross to-day,
I'll leave him all alone to play.
And I'll go dance a ring-a-round.
Partners a-plenty, I'll be bound,
For pretty maidens may be found.

[*Calling.*

Heigh-a-aye!

Voice of WOOD-SPRITE

[*Heard without.*

Heigh-a-o!

Rautendelein

My merry faun, come — dance with me, I pray!

[*Enter the* Wood-Sprite, *skipping comically across the glade.*

The Wood-Sprite

Nay, I'm no dancer; but I know a leap
Would make the mountain-goat with envy weep.
If that won't do for thee, I know a game
Will please thee more, my nixey. Fly with me;
I'll show thee in the woods a willow tree
All hollowed out with age, where never came
The sound of babbling brook, nor crow of cock.
There, in the shadow of some friendly rock,
I'll cut for thee, my own, the wondrous pipe
All maids must dance to.

Rautendelein

[*Eluding him.*

Thanks, I'm not yet ripe
For such as thou! An thou must play thy pranks,
Go — woo thy wood-wench. She may like thy shanks!
Or — go to thy dear partner, who — they say —
Another baby bears thee every day;
Except on Sundays, when, at early morn,
Three dirty little brats to thee are born!
Ha! Ha! Ha!

[*She runs off into the hut, laughing.* The Wood-Sprite *vainly pursues her and returns disconsolate.*

The Nickelmann

Brekekekex! How mad the baggage seems!
The lightning blast thee!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

[*Sitting.*

Ay! . . . I'd love to tame her.

[*He produces a short pipe and lights it by striking a match on his hoof.*

THE NICKELMANN

And how go things at home?

THE WOOD-SPRITE

So so. So so.
It's warmer here than on the hills. You're snug.
Up yonder the wind shrieks and howls all day;
The swollen clouds drift damp about the peaks,
And burst at last, like sponges, when they're squeezed.
A foul time we have of it!

THE NICKELMANN

And is that all?

THE WOOD-SPRITE

No . . . Yesterday I cut
My first spring salad. It grew near my hut.
This morning, early, I went out,
And, roaming carelessly about,
Through brush and brier,
Then climbing higher,
At last I reached the topmost wood.
There I espied a hateful brood
Of mortals, who did sweat and stew,
And dig the earth, and marble hew.
A curse upon their church and creed —
Their chapels, and their clanging bells *—

* The sprites and dwarfs hated bells, especially church bells, as disturbers of their ancient privacy.

THE NICKELMANN

Their bread they mix with cummin-seed! *

THE WOOD-SPRITE

They plague us in our woods and wells.
But vain is all our wrath and woe.
Beside the deep abyss 'twill grow
With tower and spire, and, overhead,
The cross that you and I do dread.
Ay! . . . The noisy monster was all but hung
In the lofty steeple, and soon had rung.
But I was alert! We shall never hear
That bell! It is drownèd in the mere!
[*Changing tone.*
By cock and pie!
A devil of a joke! . . . I stood on the brink
Of the cliff, chewing sorrel, to help me think,
As I rested against a stump of birch,
'Mid the mountain grasses, I watched the church.
When, all of a sudden, I saw the wing
Of a blood-red butterfly, trying to cling
To a stone. And I marked how it dipped, and tipped,
As if from a blossom the sweet it sipped.
I called. It fluttered, to left and to right,
Until on my hand I felt it light.
I knew the elf. It was faint with fright.
We babbled o' this,
And we babbled o' that,
Of the frogs that had spawned
Ere the day had dawned,—
We babbled and gabbled, a-much, I wis:
Then it broke
Into tears! . . .
I calmed its fears.

* Cummin-seed was obnoxious to the sprites.

And again it spoke.

"Oh, they're cracking their whips,
"And they gee! and they whoa!
"As they drag it aloft
"From the dale below.
"'Tis some terrible tub, that has lost its lid,
"All of iron! Will nobody rid
"Our woods of the horrible thing? 'Twould make
"The bravest moss-mannikin shudder and quake.
"They swear they will hang it, these foolish people,
"High up in the heart of the new church steeple,
"And they'll hammer, and bang, at its sides all day
"To frighten good spirits of earth away!"

I hummed, and I hawed, and I said, ho, ho!
As the butterfly fell to the earth: while I
Stole off in pursuit of a herd near by.
I guzzled my fill of good milk, I trow!
Three udders ran dry. They will seek in vain
So much as a drop of it more to drain.
Then, making my way to a swirling stream,
I hid in the brush, as a sturdy team
Came snorting, and panting, along the road —
Eight nags, tugging hard at their heavy load.
We will bide our time, quoth I — and lay
Quite still in the grass, till the mighty dray
Rumbled by: — when, stealing from hedge to hedge,
And hopping and skipping from rock to rock,
I followed the fools. They had reached the edge
Of the cliff when there came — a block!
With flanks all a-quiver, and hocks a-thrill,
They hauled and they lugged at the dray until,

Worn out by the struggle to move the bell,
They had to lie down for a moment. Well —
Quoth I to myself, the Faun will play
Them a trick that will spare them more work to-day.
One clutch at the wheel — I had loosened a spoke —
A wrench, and a blow, and the wood-work broke.
A wobble, a crack, and the hateful bell
Rolled over — and into the gulf it fell!
And oh, how it sounded,
And clanged, as it bounded,
From crag to crag, on its downward way:
Till at last in the welcoming splash and the spray
Of the lake it was lost — for aye!

[*During* The Wood-Sprite's *speech night has drawn near. It is now dusk. Several times, towards the end of the narrative, faint cries for help have been heard, coming from the wood. Enter from back,* Heinrich. *As he approaches the hut,* The Wood-Sprite *vanishes in the wood and* The Nickelmann *disappears in the well.* Heinrich *is about thirty years of age. His face is pale and careworn.*

Heinrich

Good people — open! Quick! I've lost my way!
Help! Help! I've fallen! . . . I am weak . . . I faint!
Will no one answer? . . . Help! Kind people! Help!

[*He sinks to the ground, unconscious, near the hut. The sun has set — dark pur-*

ple clouds hang over the hills. The wind rises. Enter from the wood, carrying a basket on her back, Old Wittikin.

Wittikin

Rautendel'! Come and help me with my load!
I've too much on my shoulders. Come, I say!
I'm scant o' breath! . . . Where can the girl be dawdling?

[*A bat flies across the glade.*

Ho! Stop thy gadding, flitter-mouse, and list!
Thou'lt fill thy greedy craw quite soon enough.
Come hither. Fly through yonder hole and see
If she's within. Then send her quick to me!

[*Faint lightning.* Wittikin *shakes her fist at the sky.*

Ay, ay, I see thee, Father Thor! . . . 'Twill storm!
But give thy noisy goats not too much rope,
And see thy great red beard gleams not too bright.
Rautendel'! Hey! Rautendel' . . . Dost not hear?

[*A squirrel skips across the path.*

Hey! Squirrel! Thou hast fleet and nimble feet.
Hop thou into the hut, and, shouldst thou meet
Rautendel', send her hither. As a treat,
I'll give thee, for thy pains, a nut to eat!

[Wittikin *sees* Heinrich *and touches him contemptuously with her foot.*

What's this? A stranger? Well, well, I declare!
And pray, what brings you here, my man, so late?
Rautendel'! . . . Hey! Rautendel'! [*To* Heinrich.] Are you dead?
Plague take you! As if I'd not more'n enough

To worry me — what wi' the Bailiff and the Priest
Hunting me down like a mad dog. And now
I find a dead man at my door — Rautendel'!
A rare time I'd have of it, I'll be bound,
If they should find this fellow lying here.
They'd burn my house about my ears. [*To* Heinrich.] Art dumb?
Ay. Ay.

[Rautendelein *enters from hut, and looks out inquiringly.*

Oho! Thou'rt come at last. Look there!
We have a visitor. And what a one!
He's still enough. Go! Fetch a truss of hay,
And make a litter.

Rautendelein

In the hut?

Wittikin

[*Grumbling.*
What next?
Nay, nay. We've no room in the hut for him.

[*Exit into hut.* Rautendelein *follows her. She reappears a moment later, with an armful of hay, and is about to kneel beside* Heinrich *when he recovers consciousness.*

Heinrich

Where am I? Maiden — wilt thou answer me?

Rautendelein

Why, in the mountains.

Heinrich

In the mountains? Ay —

But how . . . and why? What brought me here
to-night?

RAUTENDELEIN

Nay, gentle stranger, naught know I of that.
Why fret thyself about such trifles? See —
Here I have brought thee hay. So lay thy head
Down and take all the rest thou need'st.

HEINRICH

Yes! Yes!
'Tis rest I need. Indeed — indeed — thou'rt
right.
But rest will come to me no more, my child!
[*Uneasily.*
Now . . . tell me . . . what has happened?

RAUTENDELEIN

Nay, if I knew . . .

HEINRICH

Meseems . . . methinks . . . and . . . then . . . all
ends in dreams.
Ay, surely, I am dreaming.

RAUTENDELEIN

Here is milk.
Thou must drink some of it, for thou art weak.

HEINRICH

[*Eagerly.*
Thanks, maiden. I will drink. Give me the
milk.

[*He drinks from a bowl which she offers him.*

RAUTENDELEIN

[*While he drinks.*
Thou art not used to mountain ways. Thy home
Lies in the vale below, where mortals dwell.

And, like a hunter who once fell from the cliff
While giving chase to some wild mountain fowl,
Thou hast climbed far too high. And yet . . .
that man
Was not quite fashioned as the man thou art.

HEINRICH

[*After drinking and looking ecstatically and fixedly at* RAUTENDELEIN.
Speak on! Speak on! Thy drink was very sweet.
But sweeter still thy voice . . .
[*Again becoming anxious.*
She said — a man
Not fashioned like myself. A better man —
And yet he fell! . . . Speak on, my child.

RAUTENDELEIN

Why speak?
What can my words avail! I'll rather go
And fetch thee water from the brook, to wash
The blood and dust from off thy brow . . .

HEINRICH

[*Pleading and grasping her by the wrist.*
RAUTENDELEIN *stands undecided.*
Ah, stay!
And look into mine eyes with thy strange eyes.
For lo, the world, within thine eyes renewed,
So sweetly bedded, draws me back to life!
Stay, child. O stay!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Uneasy.*
Then . . . as thou wilt. And yet . . .

HEINRICH

[*Fevered and imploring.*

Ah, stay with me! Thou wilt not leave me so?
Thou dost not dream how dear to me thou art.
Oh, wake me not, my child. I'll tell thee all.
I fell . . . Yet — no. Speak thou; for thy dear voice
Has Heaven's own music. God did give it thee.
And I will listen. Speak! . . . Wilt thou not speak?
Wilt thou not sing to me? Why then . . . I must . . .
I fell. I know not how — I've told thee that —
Whether the path gave way beneath my feet;
Whether 'twas willingly I fell, or no —
God wot. Enough. I fell into the gulf.

[*More fevered.*

And then I clutched at a wild cherry tree
That grew between the rocks. It broke — and I,
Still clasping a bough tightly, felt a shower
Of pale pink blossoms riot round my head;
Then swift was hurled to the abyss — and died!
And even now I'm dead. It must be so.
Let no one wake me!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Uncertainly.*

Yet thou seem'st alive!

HEINRICH

I know — I know — what once I did not know:
That Life is Death, and only Death is Life.

[*Collapsing again.*

I fell. I lived — and fell. The bell fell, too!
We two — the bell and I. Was I the first —
To slip, and next — the bell? Or — the reverse?

Who seeks to know? And who could prove the truth?
And even were it proven, what care I?
Then I was living. Now — ah, now . . . I'm dead.

[*Tenderly.*

Ah, go not yet!

[*Looks at his hand.*

My hand! . . . 'Tis white as milk!
My hand! . . . It hangs so heavy! . . . It seems dead.
I cannot lift it! . . . Yet — How sweet thou art!
The touch of thy soft hair doth bring relief,
As water of Bethesda! . . . Nay, do not fear!
My hand shall never harm thee — thou art holy!
Where have we met? . . . I surely know thy face.
Somewhere, but where, or when, I cannot tell,
I wrought for thee, and strove — in one grand Bell,
To wed the silver music of thy voice
With the warm gold of a Sun-holiday.
It should have been a master-work! . . . I failed.
Then wept I tears of blood.

Rautendelein

Wept tears of blood?
I cannot follow thee. What be these tears?

Heinrich

[*Trying to raise his head.*

Thou lovely picture! . . . Help me to sit up.

[Rautendelein *stoops and supports his head.*

Dost thou bend down to me? Then, with love's arms,
Do thou release me from this cruel Earth,
Whereunto the hour nails me, as to a cross.

Release me! For thou canst. I know thou canst!
And, with thy tender hands, pluck off the thorns
That crown my head. No crown! Love — only Love!

[*His head is slightly raised. He seems exhausted.*

Thanks! Thanks!

[*Gently and in a lost kind of way as he looks at the landscape.*

Here all is beautiful! The rustling boughs
Have such a strange, full sound. The darkling arms
Of the great firs move so mysteriously.
How solemnly their heads sway to and fro!
The very soul of fairy fantasy
Sighs through the wood. It murmurs low, and then,
Still gently whisp'ring, stirs the tiny leaves.
Now it goes singing through the green wood-grass.
And now, veiled all in misty white, it nears —
It stretches out its long white hand and points
At me! . . . Now closer, it draws! It touches my ear . . .
My tongue . . . my eyes! . . . 'Tis gone! Yet thou art here!
Thou art my fantasy! . . . Kiss me, sweet fantasy! [*He faints.*

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Half to herself.*

Thy speech is strange. I know not what it means.

[*She suddenly resolves to go.*

Lie thou, and sleep.

HEINRICH

[*Dreaming.*
Kiss me, sweet fantasy!

[RAUTENDELEIN *stops, and gazes at* HEINRICH. *The darkness deepens.* RAUTENDELEIN *suddenly grows frightened and calls.*

RAUTENDELEIN

O grandmother!

WITTIKIN

[*From within the hut.*
Well, girl?

RAUTENDELEIN

Come here! Come here!

WITTIKIN

[*As above.*
Nay, come thou here, and help me make the fire!

RAUTENDELEIN

O Granny!

WITTIKIN

Hark'ee, wench. Dost hear me? Come. 'Tis time we fed the goat. And then to milk it!

RAUTENDELEIN

Grandmother! Help him! Help him! He is dying!

[*Enter from hut,* WITTIKIN. *She stands on the threshold, holding a milk pail in her left hand, and calls to her cat.*

WITTIKIN

Here! Puss, Puss, Puss!
[*She looks carelessly at* HEINRICH.
He hasn't budged, I see.

Well — mortals all must die. No help for it.
What matter? Let him be. He's better so.
Come — pussy! pussy! . . . Here is milk for thee —
Why, where is pussy? [*Calling.*
Hurry, hurry, wood-folk, when I call!
Here, I've milk a-plenty for ye all!
Hurry, hurry, hurry, trold and sprite!

[*Enter ten droll little* Trolds, *male and female. They bustle about the milk pail.*

Here is bread — for every one a bite!
Here's enough to drink, and here's to eat:
Food that dukes and earls 'ud count a treat.

[*To the other* Trolds.

Thou, go!
Thou art full, I trow.

[*To the other* Trolds.

For thee a sop —
And for thee a drop —
Now enough ye've guzzled,
And off ye hop!

[*They riot and shout.*

I'll have ye muzzled,
Unless ye stop!
Nay, this won't do —
Ye riotous crew!
Enough for to-day!
Away! Away!

[*The* Trolds *vanish into the wood. Moonlight.* The Wood-Sprite *appears, seated on the rocks beyond the hut. Putting his horny hands to his mouth, he imitates the echo of a cry for help.*

The Wood-Sprite

Help! Help!

WITTIKIN

Why, what's amiss?

DISTANT VOICES

[*From the wood.*

Heinrich! Heinrich!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

[*As above.*

Help! Help!

WITTIKIN

[*Threateningly to* THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Fool, thy knavish antics cease!
Leave our mountain-folk in peace!
Ay, ay. It pleases thee to vent thy spite
On the poor glass-workers! . . . Thou lov'st to bite
Stray dogs — to lead lost travelers into fogs,
And see them floundering in the moorland bogs.

THE WOOD-SPRITE

Granny, never heed my jests.
Soon thou shalt have noble guests!
Who rides on the goose's down?
The barber, light as lather.
Who rides on the goose's crown?
The parson, reverend father —
The teacher, with his cue —
Three screech-owls — all for you!

THE VOICES

[*Nearer.*

Heinrich!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

[*As before.*

Help!

WITTIKIN

Now may the lightning strike thee!
Wouldst hang a schoolmaster about my neck,
And eke a parson?

[*Shaking her fist at* THE WOOD-SPRITE.

Thou shalt smart for this.
I'll send thee swarming gnats, and stinging flies,
To plague thee till thou shalt be so distraught
Thou'lt long to hide thyself.

THE WOOD-SPRITE

[*With malignant glee.*

They're coming, Granny!

[*He disappears.*

WITTIKIN

Well, and what then? They're no concern o' mine.

[*To* RAUTENDELEIN, *who is gazing fixedly at* HEINRICH.

Into the hut! Blow out the light! To bed!
Quick, wench!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Sullen and defiant.*

I won't!

WITTIKIN

What? Disobey me?

RAUTENDELEIN

Yes!

WITTIKIN

And why?

RAUTENDELEIN

They'll take him from me.

WITTIKIN

Well? What of 't?

RAUTENDELEIN

They must not take him, Granny!

WITTIKIN

Girl, ha' done!
And let them deal wi' him as they may list.
Dust will to dust, and some day he must die.
So let him die. He'll be the better for 't.
See how life irks him, how it rends his heart,
Wi' pain and agony.

HEINRICH

[*Dreaming.*
The Sun sets fast!

WITTIKIN

He never saw the Sun, girl! Let him be.
Come. Follow me. Be warned, or thou wilt rue!

[*Exit into hut. Cries of* "Heinrich! Heinrich!" RAUTENDELEIN *listens for a moment. Then she suddenly breaks a flowery twig from a bough, and draws a circle with it round* HEINRICH *as she speaks the following lines.*

RAUTENDELEIN

With the first fresh buds of Spring,
Lo, I draw the magic ring!
Safe from every harm and ill,
Thus thou art. It is my will!
Thou art thine, and thine, and mine.
None may cross the mystic line!
Be thou youth, or man, or maid,
Here thou surely must be stayed!

[*She hides behind the trees in shadow.*
[*Enter one after the other, from the wood,* The Vicar, The Barber, *and* The Schoolmaster.

The Vicar

I see a light.

The Schoolmaster

And I!

The Vicar

Where are we now?

The Barber

God only knows. Again I hear that cry
Of "Help! Help! Help!"

The Vicar

It is the Master's voice!

The Schoolmaster

I heard no cry.

The Barber

It came from yonder height.

The Schoolmaster

If one fell up to Heaven, that might be,
But, as a general rule, one tumbles — down:
From cliff to vale, and not from vale to cliff.
The Master lies — I'd stake my soul upon 't —
Full fifty fathoms deeper: not up here.

The Barber

'Ods bodikins! Did you not hear him then?
If that was not the voice of Master Heinrich,
May I be set to shave old Rübezahl!
As I'm a living barber, I will swear
I heard a cry.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Where from?

THE VICAR

What place is this?
Ere we continue, tell me that, my friends.
My face is bleeding; I can hardly drag
One foot after another. How they ache!
I'll go no further.

A VOICE

Help!

THE VICAR

Again that voice!

THE BARBER

And this time it was close to where we stand!

THE VICAR

[*Sitting wearily.*
I'm racked with pain. Indeed, my worthy friends,
I can no more. So leave me, in God's name.
In truth, though you should beat me black and blue,
You could not make me budge another step.
I am worn out. Alack, that this glad day
Should end so sadly! Who had ever thought
Such things could happen! And the mighty bell —
The noblest of the Master's master-works —!
Thy ways, O Lord, indeed pass finding out
And are most wonderful!

THE BARBER

Ay, Father, ay.
And do you wish to know what place this be?
Well, I will tell you. If you'll be advised,
You'll get from hence — and that without delay.

'Twere better far we spent the livelong night
Bare-backed, and in a hornet's nest, than here.
For, by the Lord, we're on the Silver Hill!
Within a hundred steps should stand the house
Of that accursèd witch. So — let's away!

THE VICAR

I cannot budge.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Nay, come, I pray you, come.
Worse things than witches are encountered here.
If they were all, I should not turn a hair.
Ah, there's no wilder spot for leagues around —
A paradise of smugglers, thieves, and rogues —
A trysting-place for cut-throat murderers —
So infamous that Peter — he who longed
To know what fear and trembling meant — might learn
Both easily — if he but came this way.

THE BARBER

Yes. One and one make two — we all know that.
But that is not the only thing worth knowing.
I hope, my master, you may never learn
What witchcraft means! . . . The hellish sluts who lurk,
Like toads in a hole, hatching their evil plots,
May send you illnesses, and plague your ox,
Make blood flow from the udders of your cows
Instead of milk, and rot your sheep with worms —
Or curse your children with unwholesome wens,
And horrible ulcers. All this they can do.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

You're wandering, sirs. The night has turned your heads.

While you go babbling here of witches' games,
Your ears grow dull. Heard you not moans? By Heaven!
I see the very man we seek!

THE VICAR

See whom?

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Why, Master Heinrich.

THE BARBER

Oh, he's lost his wits!

THE VICAR

'Twas witchcraft.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Nay, then two and two's not four.
But five. And that's impossible. Prate not
Of witches. For, as I do hope for Heaven,
There lies the master bell-founder himself!
Look! Now the clouds have ceased to hide the moon.
Look, gentlemen! Now! Now! Well — was I right?

THE VICAR

Indeed you were, my master.

THE BARBER

'Tis the bell-founder!

[*All three hurry towards* HEINRICH, *but recoil on reaching the edge of the magic ring.*

THE VICAR

Oh!

THE BARBER

Oh!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Oh! Oh!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Becoming visible for a moment among the trees.*

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

[*She vanishes amid peals of mocking laughter. A pause.*

THE SCHOOLMASTER

[*Bewildered.*

What was it?

THE BARBER

Ay. What was 't?

THE VICAR

I heard a laugh!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

The bright light dazzled me. I do believe
It's made a hole in my head as big as my fist.

THE VICAR

You heard the laughter?

THE BARBER

Ay, and something cracked.

THE VICAR

The laughter seemed to come from every pine
That rustles round us in the growing gloom.
There! Yonder! Where the horn-owl hoots and flies!

THE BARBER

Didn't I tell you of these devilish folk?
O Lord, O Lord! I warned you of their spells.

D'ye think we're safe here? As for me, I quake —
My flesh creeps. Curses on the hag, say I!

THE VICAR

[*Raising the crucifix which hangs round his neck, and moving steadfastly towards the hut.*

You may be right. Yet, though the Devil himself
Dwelt here, I'd still say: Courage! On! Still on!
Against him we will pit God's Holy Word!
Ah! never yet was Satan's craft more clear
Than when he hurled the Master and the bell
To death — God's servant and his instrument —
The bell that, from the edge of the abyss
Had sung the hymn of everlasting Love,
And Peace, and Mercy, through the firmament!
Here stand we as true soldiers of the Lord!
I'll knock!

THE BARBER

D — d — don't risk it!

THE VICAR

Yes! I say, I'll knock!

[*He knocks at the door of the hut.*

WITTIKIN

[*From within the hut.*

Who's there?

THE VICAR

A Christian!

WITTIKIN

Christian or no Christian,
What d'you want?

THE VICAR

Open!

WITTIKIN

[*Appearing in the doorway, carrying a lighted lantern.*

Well? What's your will?

THE VICAR

In God's name, woman, whom thou dost not know —

WITTIKIN

Oho! A pious opening, I declare!

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Thou carrion-crow, how durst thou wag thy tongue?
The measure's full — thy time is meted out.
Thy evil life and thy accursèd deeds
Have made thee hated through the countryside.
So — an thou do not now as thou art bid —
Ere dawn the red cock* from thy roof shall crow —
Thy den of thieves shall flame and smoke to Heaven!

THE BARBER

[*Crossing himself repeatedly.*

Thou wicked cat! I'm not afraid of thee!
Ay — scowl, and glare, and glower, as thou wilt!
Though thy red eyes should light upon my corpse,
They'll find the Cross before them. Do as thou'rt bid!

THE VICAR

I charge thee, woman, in God's holy name,
Have done with all thy devilish juggleries,

* In Germany "der rothe Hahn" is a symbol of incendiarism.

And help this man! Here lies a child of God,
A Master, gifted with a wondrous art
That him doth honor, while it puts to shame
The damnèd companies of air and Hell.

WITTIKIN

[*Who has been prowling round* HEINRICH *with her lantern.*

And, what's all that to do wi' me? Enough!
You're welcome to the creature. Take him hence.
What harm did I to him? For aught I care,
He may live on, till he has spent his breath.
I'll wager that won't be so very long!
Ye name him "Master," and ye love the sound
O' the big iron bells the creature makes.
Ye all are hard o' hearin', or ye'd know
There's no good in his bells. He knows it, too.
Ah, I could tell ye, an I would, what's wrong.
The best and worst o' them ring false. They're cracked.
There! Take the litter. Bear the man away —
The "Master," as ye call him! Master Milksop!
[*To* HEINRICH.
Get up! Go home and help the parson preach!
Go — help the schoolmaster to birch his boys —
Go — mix the lather in the barber's shop!

[THE BARBER *and* THE SCHOOLMASTER *lift* HEINRICH *on to the litter.*

THE VICAR

Thou wicked, scolding hag! Restrain thy tongue!
Thy way shall lead thee straight to Hell. Begone!

WITTIKIN

Oh, spare your sermons. I ha' heard ye preach.
I know, I know. 'Tis sinful to ha' senses.

The earth's a coffin, and the Heavens above
Are but a coffin-lid. The stars are holes;
The sun's a bigger hole in the blue sky.
The world 'ud come to grief wi'out the priests,
And God Himself ye'd make a bug-a-boo!
The Lord should take a rod to ye — poor fools!
Ay, fools are ye — all, all! and nothing more!

[*She bangs open her door and goes into hut.*

THE VICAR

Thou beldame!

THE BARBER

For Heaven's sake — don't vex her more!
If you should goad her further, we are lost.

[*Exeunt* THE VICAR, THE SCHOOLMASTER, *and* THE BARBER *into the wood, bearing away* HEINRICH *on the litter. The moon shines out, and lights up the peaceful landscape.* FIRST, SECOND, *and* THIRD ELVES *steal out of the wood one after the other and join hands in a dance.*

FIRST ELF

[*Whispering.*

Sister!

SECOND ELF

[*As above.*

Sister!

FIRST ELF

[*As above.*

White and chill
Shines the moon across the hill.
Over bank, and over brae,
Queen she is, and Queen shall stay.

Second Elf

Whence com'st thou?

First Elf

From where the light
In the waterfall gleams bright,
Where the glowing flood doth leap,
Roaring, down into the deep.
Then, from out the mirk and mist,
Where the foaming torrent hissed,
Past the dripping rocks and spray,
Up I swiftly made my way.

Third Elf

[*Joining them.*

Sisters, is it here ye dance?

First Elf

Wouldst thou join us? Quick — advance!

Second Elf

And whence com'st thou?

Third Elf

Hark and hist!
Dance, and dance, as ye may list!
'Mid the rocky peaks forlorn
Lies the lake where I was born.
Starry gems are mirrored clear
On the face of that dark mere.
Ere the fickle moon could wane,
Up I swept my silver train.
Where the mountain breezes sigh,
Over cliff and crag came I!

Fourth Elf

[*Entering.*

Sisters!

First Elf

Sister! Join the round!

All

[*Together.*

Ring-a-ring-a-ring-around!

Fourth Elf

From Dame Holle's flowery brae,
Secretly I stole away.

First Elf

Wind and wander, in and out!

All

[*Together.*

Ring-a-ring-a-round-about!

[*Lightning and distant thunder.*

[*Enter suddenly, from the hut,* Rautendelein. *Clasping her hands behind her head, she watches the dance from the doorway. The moonlight falls full on her.*

Rautendelein

Ho, my fairies!

First Elf

Hark! A cry!

Second Elf

Owch! My dress is all awry!

Rautendelein

Ho, ye fairies!

Third Elf

Oh, my gown!
Flit and flutter, up and down.

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Joining in the dance.*

Let me join the merry round.
Ring-a-ring-a-ring-around!
Silver nixie, sweetest maid,
See how richly I'm arrayed.
All of silver, white and rare,
Granny wove my dress so fair.
Thou, my fairy brown, I vow,
Browner far am I than thou.
And, my golden sister fair,
I can match thee with my hair,
Now I toss it high — behold,
Thou hast surely no such gold.
Now it tumbles o'er my face:
Who can rival me in grace?

ALL

[*Together.*

Wind and wander, in and out,
Ring-a-ring-a-round-about!

RAUTENDELEIN

Into the gulf there fell a bell.
Where is it lying? Will ye tell?

ALL

[*Together.*

Wind and wander, in and out,
Ring-a-ring-a-round-about!
Daisy and forget-me-not,
Fairy footsteps injure not.

[*Enter* THE WOOD-SPRITE, *skipping. Thunder — this time louder. During the following speech, a storm rages — thunder and hail.*

THE WOOD-SPRITE

Daisy and forget-me-not
Crush I in the earth to rot.
If the moorland's all a-drip
'Tis because I leap, and skip!
Now the bull doth seek his mate,
Bellows at the stable gate.
And the heifer, sleeping by,
Lifts her head and lows reply.
On the stallion's warm brown hide
Every fly doth seek his bride,
While the midges dance above,
Fill the air with life and love.
See! The ostler woos the maid!
Buss her, fool! Dost fear the jade?
With the rotting straw for bed,
Soft and tender, lo they wed!
Hul'lo! Hul'lo! Heigh-o-hey!
Whisp'ring's over for to-day.
Done the dancing, hushed and chill,
Lusty life is master still!
Be it early, be it late,
Mews the tom-cat, mews its mate.
Stork, and thrush, and nightingale,
Hart, and hare, and hen, and quail,
Snipe, and hawk, and swan, and duck,
Crane, and pheasant, doe and buck,
Beetle, moth, and mole, and louse,
Toad, and frog, and bat, and mouse,
Bee, and gnat, and moth, and fly —
All must love, and all must die!

[THE WOOD-SPRITE *snatches up one of the* ELVES *and carries her off into the wood. The three other* ELVES *vanish in different directions.* RAUTENDELEIN *remains*

standing alone and sad, in the middle of the glade. The storm gradually dies away.

[The Nickelmann *rises from the well, as before.*

The Nickelmann

Brekekekex! — Brekekekex! Hey! Ho!
Why dost thou stand there?

Rautendelein

Thou dear water-sprite —
Alas, I am so sad. So sad am I!

The Nickelmann

[*Mockingly.*
Brekekekex! And which eye hurts thee, dear?

Rautendelein

[*Gaily.*
The left eye. But, perhaps, thou think'st I jest?

The Nickelmann

Ay, surely, surely.

Rautendelein

[*Pointing to a tear in her eye.*
Look — what can it be?

The Nickelmann

What dost thou mean?

Rautendelein

Why — see what's in my eye!

The Nickelmann

What's in thine eye? Come — let me see it close.

Rautendelein

A warm, wet drop has fallen on my lid.

THE NICKELMANN

The deuce it has! Come nearer — let me see.

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Holding out the tear to him.*

A tiny, pure, warm, glitt'ring drop of dew.
There, only see!

THE NICKELMANN

By Heaven! 'Tis beautiful.
How would it please thee an I took the thing
And set it in a fine, pink shell for thee?

RAUTENDELEIN

Why, as thou wilt. I'll lay it on the edge
Of the well. What can it be?

THE NICKELMANN

A wondrous gem!
Within that little globe lies all the pain,
And all the joy, the world can ever know.
'Tis called — a tear!

RAUTENDELEIN

A tear! . . . I must have wept.
So now at last I've learned what these tears be . . .
Oh, tell me something!

THE NICKELMANN

Come to me, dear child!

RAUTENDELEIN

Not I, forsooth. What good were that to me?
The edge of thine old well is wet and rough;
'Tis overrun with spiders, worms and — worse.
They irk me — all of them. And so dost thou.

THE NICKELMANN

Brekekekex! I grieve to hear it, dear.

RAUTENDELEIN

Another of those drops! How strange!

THE NICKELMANN

More rain!
Behold! Now Father Thor is all ablaze.
The lightnings from his beard fall soft, and blink
Like babies' eyes, setting the misty train
Of rolling clouds aglow with purple flame.
And yonder, near the grey, mark how a flight
Of ravens rushes madly through the night
To keep him company. With every flash
Their wings gleam wetter in the whirling rain.
Hark, child, how thirstily our Mother Earth
Drinks every drop! And how the trees and grass,
The flies and worms, grow glad in the quick light!
[*Lightning.*
Quorax! Now in the valley! Master! Hail!
Old Thor is kindling a rare Easter fire.
His hammer flares — twelve thousand miles it sweeps!
The church-tower totters — now the belfry cracks!
The smoke pours out! . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

Enough! Enough! No more!
Come, tell me something else. I'm tired of Thor.

THE NICKELMANN

Thou saucy sparrow, thou — Brekekekex!
What ails the creature? When it's stroked — it pecks.

A pretty way to thank one! When you're done,
You're no bit further than ere you'd begun!
Am I not right? . . . Still pouting, eh? . . .
Well, well.
What wouldst thou know?

RAUTENDELEIN

Oh, nothing. Do but go!

THE NICKELMANN

Naught thou wouldst know?

RAUTENDELEIN

Naught!

THE NICKELMANN

[*Imploringly.*
Then, speak thou, I pray.

RAUTENDELEIN

I long to leave you all and go away!
[*Her eyes fill with tears and she stares into the distance.*

THE NICKELMANN

[*With anguish.*
What have I done to thee? Where wouldst thou go?
Is it the world of men that thou wouldst know?
I warn thee, maiden. Man's a curious thing,
Who naught but woe to such as thee could bring.
Although, perchance, with ours his fate's entwined,
He is, yet is not quite, of our own kind.
His world is ours — and yet, I say, beware!
Half here, he lives — half, no one could tell where!
Half he's our brother; yet, this many a day,
A foe he's been, and lost to us for aye.

Woe, woe to all who our free mountains flee
To join these mortals, hoping bliss to see!
Man's feet are in the Earth. In toil and pain
He lives his fleeting life. And yet — he's vain.
He's like a plant that in a cellar shoots,
And needs must pluck and pluck at its own roots.
So, languishing for light, he rots away,
Nor ever knows the joy of one sun-ray.
The breath of Spring that kisses the green leaf,
To sickly boughs brings death, and not relief.
Pry thou no further, but let Man alone:
Lest thou should hang about thy neck — a stone.
Man will but sadden thee with his grey skies,
And turn thy happy laugh to tears and sighs.
Thou shalt be chained unto an ancient Book.
Accurst — no more upon the Sun thou'lt look!

Rautendelein

Grandmother says thou art a learned seer.
Yet, an thou wilt but in thy waters peer,
Thou'lt see that never yet a rill did flow
But longed into the world of men to go.

The Nickelmann

[*Angrily.*

Quorax! Brekekekex! Be not so bold.
Hear now the words of one ten centuries old!
Let slavish streams pursue their fated way,
Work, wash, for men, and grind their corn each day,
Water their cabbages and garden stuff,
And swallow — Heav'n knows what! And now . . . enough!

[*Warmly and earnestly.*

But, O my dear Princess Rautendelein,
For thee a King's chamber were none too fine.

I know a rare crown, all of crystal so green,
In a great golden hall, thou shalt wear it, my queen.
The floor and the roof are of clear blue stone,
Red coral the coffers and chests I own. . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

And what though thy coffers of coral be wrought?
Life lived with the fishes were good for naught.
And though thy King's crown of pure sapphire should be,
Thy daughters should prink it alone with thee.
My own golden tresses are far more dear;
Their touch a caress is; my crown is — here!
[*She turns to go.*

THE NICKELMANN

Where art thou going?

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Airily and indifferently.*
What is that to thee?

THE NICKELMANN

[*Sorrowfully.*
Much. Much. Brekekekex!

RAUTENDELEIN

Oh, whither I will,
Go I.

THE NICKELMANN

And whither wouldst go?

RAUTENDELEIN

Away and away!

THE NICKELMANN

Away and away?

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Flinging her arms aloft.*

To the world — of men!

[*She vanishes in the wood.*

THE NICKELMANN

[*Terrified.*

Quorax!

[*Whimpering.*

Quorax!

[*Softly.*

Quorax!

[*Shaking his head sadly.*

Brekekekex!

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

An old-fashioned room in the house of HEINRICH *the bell-founder. A deep recess occupies half the back wall. In the recess is a large open fireplace, with a chimney above it. A copper kettle is suspended above the unlighted fire. The other half of the back wall, set at an angle, is lighted by a large old-fashioned window, with bottle-glass panes. Below this window, a bed. Doors right and left. That on the right leads to the workshop, while that on the left leads to the courtyard. In the foreground, right, a table and chairs placed. On the table: a full jug of milk, mugs, and a loaf of bread. Near the table, a tub. The room is decorated with works by Adam Kraft, Peter Fischer, etc., conspicuous among them a painted wooden image of Christ on the Cross. Seated at the farther side of the table, and, in their Sunday best, the two* CHILDREN (*boys*) *of* HEINRICH (*aged respectively five and nine*), *with their mugs of milk before them.* MAGDA, *their mother, also in her Sunday best, enters from the right, with a bunch of cowslips in her hand.*

Early morning. The light grows brighter as the action progresses.

MAGDA

See, children, what I've brought you from the fields!

Beyond the garden — a whole patch grew wild.
Now we can make ourselves look fine and gay,
In honor of your father's birthday feast.

First Child

Oh, give me some!

Second Child

And me!

Magda

There! Five for each!
And every single one they say's a key *
That opens Heaven. Now drink your milk, my dears,
And eat your bread. 'Tis almost time to start.
The road to church, you know, is long and steep.

[Neighbour [*a woman*]
[*Looking in at the window.*
What! Up already, neighbour?

Magda

[*At the window.*
Yes, indeed.
I hardly closed my eyes the livelong night.
But, 'twas not care that kept me wide-awake.
So now I'm just as fresh as if I'd slept
Sound as a dormouse. Why, how bright it is!

Neighbour

Ay. Ay. You're right.

Magda

You'll come with us, I hope?
Now don't say no. You'll find it easy walking

* In German the cowslip is called "Himmelschlüssel," *i. e.*, "the key of Heaven."

On the road . . . These tiny children's feet
Shall lead the way, and gently mark our steps.
If you must have the truth, I long for wings:
I'm wild to-day with joy and eagerness!

NEIGHBOUR

And has your good-man not been home all night?

MAGDA

What are you dreaming of? I'll be content
If only the big bell is safely hung
In time to ring the people in to mass!
You see — the time was short. They'd none to waste.
And as for sleeping — if the Master snatched
So much as one short wink in the wood-grass —
Why, Heaven be praised! But, oh, what does it matter?
The work was hard: but great is the reward.
You cannot think how pure, and clear, and true,
The new bell sounds. Just wait until you hear
Its voice ring out to-day from the church tower.
'Tis like a prayer, a hymn, a song of praise —
Filling the heart with comfort and with gladness.

NEIGHBOUR

No doubt, ma'am. Yet one thing amazes me.
From my front door, as doubtless you're aware,
The church upon the hill is plainly seen.
Now — I had heard that when the bell was hung
A white flag would be hoisted from the tower.
I've seen no sign of that white flag. Have you?

MAGDA

Oh, look again. It must be there by now.

NEIGHBOUR

No, no. It's not.

MAGDA

Well, even were you right,
It would not frighten me. Did you but know
The fret and toil and pain, by night and day,
It cost the Master to complete his work,
You would not wonder if the final stroke
Should be delayed a bit. I understand.
By this time, I'll be bound, the flag is there.
Why, yes, I'm sure it is, could we but see 't.

NEIGHBOUR

I can't believe it. In the village streets
They do say something dreadful has occurred.
Dark omens, boding evil, fill the air.
But now, a farmer saw a naked witch,
Perched on a boar's back, riding through his corn.
Lifting a stone, he cast it at the hag —
Straightway his hand dropped — palsied to the knuckles!
'Tis said that all the mischievous mountain sprites
Are leagued and up in arms against the bell.
How strange you have not heard all this before!
Well — now the Bailiff's gone into the hills,
With half the village at his heels, to see . . .

MAGDA

The Bailiff? Merciful God! What can be wrong?

NEIGHBOUR

Why, nothing's certain. All may yet be well.
There — don't take on so, neighbour. Come — be calm!
It's not so bad as that. Now don't 'ee fret.
It seems the wagon and the bell broke down . . .
That's all we've heard.

MAGDA

Pray Heav'n that be the worst!
What matters one bell more or less! . . . If he,
The Master, be but safe — these flowers may stay.
Yet — till we know what's happened . . . Here, prithee,
Take the two children . . .

[*She lifts the two* CHILDREN *through the window.*

Will you?

NEIGHBOUR

Why, to be sure.

MAGDA

Thanks. Take them home with you. And, as for me,
Ah, I must go, as fast as go I can,
To see what may be done — to help. For I
Must be with my dear Master — or, I die!

[*Exit hurriedly.*

[*The* NEIGHBOUR *retires with the* CHILDREN. *Confused noise of voices without. Then a piercing cry from* MAGDA.

[*Enter quickly* THE VICAR, *sighing, and wiping the tears from his eyes. He looks round the room hastily, and turns down the coverlet of the bed. Then, hurrying to the door, he meets* THE SCHOOLMASTER *and* THE BARBER, *carrying* HEINRICH *in on the litter seen in Act One.* HEINRICH *reclines on a rude bed of green branches.* MAGDA, *half beside herself with anguish, follows, supported by a* MAN *and a* WOMAN. *Crowd*

of Villagers *presses in behind* Magda. Heinrich *is laid on his own bed.*

The Vicar

[*To* Magda.

Bear up, my mistress! Put your trust in God!
We laid him on our litter as one dead;
Yet, on the way, he came to life again,
And, as the doctor told us, only now,
Hope's not yet lost.

Magda

[*Moaning.*

Dear God, who speaks of hope?
A moment since, I was so happy! . . . Now —
What's come to me? What's happened? Won't you speak?
Where are the children?

The Vicar

Put your trust in God.
Do but have patience, mistress. Patience and faith!
Often — remember — in our direst need
God's help is nearest. And, forget not this:
Should He, of His all-wisdom, have resolved,
In His own time, to call the Master hence,
Still there shall be this comfort for your soul —
Your husband goes from Earth to endless bliss.

Magda

Why do you speak of comfort, reverend sir?
Do I need comfort? Nay — he will get well.
He must get well.

The Vicar

So all of us do hope.
But . . . should he not . . . God's holy will be done.

Come now what may, the Master's fight is won.
To serve the Lord, he fashioned his great bell.
To serve the Lord, he scaled the mountain-heights —
Where the malignant powers of Darkness dwell,
And the Abyss defies the God of Hosts.
Serving the Lord, at last he was laid low —
Braving the hellish spirits in his path.
They feared the gospel that his bell had rung:
So leagued themselves against him, one and all,
In devilish brotherhood. God punish them!

The Barber

A wonder-working woman lives hard by,
Who heals, as the Disciples healed of old,
By prayer and faith.

The Vicar

Let some one search for her:
And when she's found, return with her at once.

Magda

What's come to him? Why do you stand and gape?
Off with you all! You shall not stare at him
With your unfeeling eyes. D'you hear? Begone!
Cover him — so — with linen, lest your looks
Should shame the Master. Now — away with you!
Get to the juggler's, if you needs must gape.
Ah, God! What's happened? . . . Are ye all struck dumb?

The Schoolmaster

Truly, 'tis hard to tell just what took place.
Whether he tried to stop the bell — or what . . .

This much is certain: if you could but see
How deep he fell, you would go down on your knees
And thank the Lord. For, if your husband lives,
'Tis nothing short of the miraculous!

HEINRICH

[*Feebly.*

Give me a little water!

MAGDA

[*Driving out the* VILLAGERS *quickly.*

Out you go!

THE VICAR

Go, my good people. He has need of rest.

[VILLAGERS *withdraw.*

If I can serve you, mistress, why, you know
Where you may find me.

THE BARBER

Yes, and me.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

And me.

No. On reflection, I'll stay here.

MAGDA

You'll go!

HEINRICH

Give me some water!

[THE VICAR, SCHOOLMASTER *and* BARBER *withdraw slowly, talking low, shaking their heads, and shrugging their shoulders.*

MAGDA

[*Hastening to* HEINRICH *with water.*

Heinrich, are you awake?

HEINRICH

I'm parched. Give me some water. Can't you hear?

MAGDA

[*Unable to control herself.*

Nay, patience.

HEINRICH

Magda, all too soon I'll learn
What patience means. Bear with me yet a while.
It will not be for long.

[*He drinks.*

Thanks, Magda. Thanks.

MAGDA

Don't speak to me so strangely, Heinrich. Don't!
I . . . I'm afraid.

HEINRICH

[*Fevered and angry.*

Thou must not be afraid.
When I am gone, thou'lt have to live alone.

MAGDA

I cannot . . . no, I will not . . . live without thee!

HEINRICH

Thy pain is childish. Torture me no more!
It is unworthy,— for thou art a mother.
Bethink thee what that word means, and be brave!

MAGDA

Ah, do not be so stern and harsh with me!

HEINRICH

[*Painfully.*

The plain truth harsh and stern? Again I say —
Thy place is by the bedside of thy boys.

There lies thy joy, thy peace, thy work, thy life.
All — all is tucked up in their fair, white sheets.
Could it be otherwise, 'twere infamous!

MAGDA

[*Falling on his neck.*
So help me Heav'n, I love thee far, far, more
Than our dear children, and myself, and all!

HEINRICH

Then woe unto ye all, too soon bereaved!
And thrice-unhappy I, untimely doomed
To snatch the milk and bread from your poor lips!
Yet, on my tongue, I feel them turn to poison.
That, too, is just! . . . Farewell. Thee I commend
To one from whom none living may escape.
Many a man has found Death's deepest shadow
Prove but a welcome light. God grant it be!
[*Tenderly.*
Give me thy hand. I've done thee many a wrong
By word and deed. Often I've grieved thy heart,
Far, far, too often. But thou wilt forgive me!
I would have spared thee, had I but been free.
I know not what compelled me; yet I know
I could not choose but stab thee — and myself.
Forgive me, Magda!

MAGDA

I forgive thee? What?
If thou dost love me, Heinrich, be less sad:
Or thou wilt bring the tears back. Rather — scold.
Thou knowest well how dear —

HEINRICH

[*Painfully.*

I do not know!

MAGDA

Nay, who, but thou, did wake my woman's soul?
Till thou didst come, I was a poor, dull clod,
Pining away beneath a cheerless sky.
Thou — thou — didst rescue me and make me live,
Fill me with joy, and set my heart in the sun.
And never did I feel thy love more sure
Than when, with thy strong hand, thou'dst draw my face
Out of the dark, and turn it towards the light.
And thou wouldst have me pardon thee! For what?
Do I not owe thee all I love in life?

HEINRICH

Strangely entangled seems the web of souls.

MAGDA

[*Stroking his hair tenderly.*

If I have ever been a help to thee —
If I have sometimes cheered thy working hours —
If favour in thine eyes I ever found . . .
Bethink thee, Heinrich: I, who would have given
Thee everything — my life — the world itself —
I had but that to pay thee for thy love!

HEINRICH

[*Uneasily.*

I'm dying. That is best. God means it well.
Should I live on . . . Come nearer, wife, and hear me.
'Tis better for us both that I should die.

Thou think'st, because we blossomed out together,
I was the sun that caused thy heart to bloom.
But that the eternal Wonder-Worker wrought,
Who, on the wings of His chill winter-storms,
Rides through a million million woodland flowers,
Slaying them, as He passes, in their Spring!
'Tis better for us both that I should die.
See: I was cracked and ageing — all misshaped.
If the great Bell-Founder who moulded me
Tosses aside His work, I shall not mourn.
When He did hurl me down to the abyss,
After my own poor, faulty handiwork,
I did not murmur: for my work was bad!
Good-wife — the bell that sank into the mere
Was not made for the heights — it was not fit
To wake the answering echoes of the peaks!

MAGDA

I cannot read the meaning of thy words.
A work — so highly prized, so free from flaw,
So clear and true that, when it first rang out
Between the mighty trees from which it hung,
All marveled and exclaimed, as with one voice,
"The Master's bell sings as the Angels sing!"

HEINRICH

[*Fevered.*

'Twas for the valley, not the mountain-top!

MAGDA

That is not true! Hadst thou but heard, as I,
The Vicar tell the Clerk, in tones that shook,
"How gloriously 'twill sound upon the heights!" . . .

HEINRICH

'Twas for the valley — not the mountain-top!

I only know 't. The Vicar does not know.
So I must die — I wish to die, my child.
For, look now: should I heal — as men would call 't —
Thanks to the art of our good village leech,
I'd be at best a botch, a crippled wretch;
And so the warm and generous draught of life —
Ofttimes I've found it bitter, ofttimes sweet,
But ever it was strong, as I did drink 't —
Would turn to a stale, flat, unsavoury brew,
Thin and grown cold and sour. I'll none of it!
Let him who fancies it enjoy the draught.
Me it would only sicken and repel.
Hush! Hear me out. Though thou shouldst haply find
A doctor of such skill that he could cure me,
Giving me back my joy — nerving my hand,
Till it could turn to the old, daily task —
Even then, Magda, I were still undone.

MAGDA

For God's sake, husband, tell me what to think!
What has come over thee — a man so strong,
So blessed, so weighted down with Heaven's best gifts;
Respected, loved, of all — of all admired,
A master of thy craft! . . . A hundred bells
Hast thou set ringing, in a hundred towers.
They sing thy praise, with restless industry;
Pouring the deep, glad beauty of thy soul
As from a hundred wine-cups, through the land.
At eve, the purple-red — at dawn, God's gold —
Know thee. Of both thou art become a part.
And thou — rich, rich, beyond thy greatest need —
Thou, voicing God — able to give, and give,

Rolling in happiness, where others go
Begging their daily dole of joy or bread —
Thou look'st unthankfully upon thy work!
Then, Heinrich, why must I still bear the life
That thou dost hate so? . . . What is life to me?
What could that be to me which thou dost scorn —
Casting it from thee, like a worthless thing!

HEINRICH

Mistake me not. Now thou thyself hast sounded
Deeper and clearer than my loudest bells.
And many a one I've made! . . . I thank thee, Magda.
Yet thou shalt understand my thought. Thou must.
Listen! . . . The latest of my works had failed.
With anguished heart I followed where they climbed,
Shouting and cursing loudly, as the bell
Was dragged towards the peak. And then — it fell.
It fell a hundred fathoms deep, ay, more,
Into the mere. There, in the mere, now lies
The last and noblest work my art could mould!
Not all my life, as I have lived it, Magda,
Had fashioned, or could fashion, aught so good.
Now I have thrown it after my bad work.
While I lie drinking the poor dregs of life,
Deep in the waters of the lake it's drowned.
I mourn not for what's lost. And then — I mourn:
Knowing this only — neither bell, nor life,
Shall evermore come back. Alas! woe's me!
My heart's desire was bound up in the tones —
The buried tones — I never more shall hear.

And now the life to which I clung so tight
Is turned to bitterness, and grief, and rue,
Madness, and gloom, confusion, pain, and gall!
. . . . . .
Well, let life go! The service of the valleys
Charms me no longer, and no more their peace
Calms my wild blood. Since on the peak I stood,
All that I am has longed to rise, and rise,
Cleaving the mists, until it touched the skies!
I would work wonders with the power on high:
And, since I may not work them, being so weak;
Since, even could I, with much straining, rise,
I should but fall again — I choose to die!
Youth — a new youth — I'd need, if I should live:
Out of some rare and magic mountain flower
Marvelous juices I should need to press —
Heart-health, and strength, and the mad lust of triumph,
Steeling my hand to work none yet have dreamed of!

MAGDA

O Heinrich, Heinrich, did I but know the spot
Where that thou pantest for, the Spring of Youth,
Lies hid, how gladly would these feet of mine
Wear themselves out to find it for thee! Yea,
Even though the waters which restored thy life
Should bring me death!

HEINRICH

[*Tormented, collapsing and delirious.*
Thou dearest, truest! . . . No, I will not drink!
Keep it! . . . The Spring is full of blood! . . . blood! . . . blood!
I will not! . . . No! . . . Leave me . . . and . . . let me . . . die!

[*He becomes unconscious.*

[*Enter* The Vicar.

The Vicar

How goes it with the patient, mistress?

Magda

Ill!

Terribly ill! He's sick in every part.
Some strange, mysterious pain's consuming him.
I know not what to fear, and what to hope.

[*Hurriedly throwing a scarf over her shoulders.*

Did you not speak of a woman who works miracles?

The Vicar

I did. Indeed, 'tis that has brought me back.
She lives . . . at most a mile away from here . . .
Her name . . . I can't recall it. But she lives,
If I mistake not, in the pinewood . . . Ay . . .
Her name . . .

Magda

Not Wittikin?

The Vicar

How can you ask!
Why, she's a wicked witch, the Devil's dam,
And she must die. By now they're up in arms,
Eager for battle with the pestilent fiend.
With cudgels, torches, stones, they're hurrying fast
To make an end of her. For you must know
She's charged with all the evil that afflicts us.
No. I was thinking of . . . Dame Findeklee . . .
A shepherd's widow . . . and a worthy soul . . .
Her husband left her an old recipe

Which, as I am assured by many here,
Has wondrous virtues. Will you go for her?

MAGDA

Yes, yes, most reverend sir!

THE VICAR

You'll go at once?

[*Enter* RAUTENDELEIN, *disguised as a peasant girl, and carrying a basket of berries in her hand.*

MAGDA

[*To* RAUTENDELEIN.
What wouldst thou, child? . . . Who art thou? . . .

THE VICAR

Why —'tis Anna,
Anna — the maiden from the wayside inn.
Nay, 'twould be vain to question her. Alas,
She's dumb. A good girl. Ah, she's brought some berries.

MAGDA

Come here, my child . . . What was't I wished to say . . .
Ah, yes! This man lies sick. When he awakes
Be near to help him. Dost thou understand me?
Dame Findeklee . . . That was the name, you said? . . .
But, no; I cannot go. It is too far.
If you'll stay here a moment, I am sure,
My neighbour will go for me . . . I'll come back.
And don't forget . . . O God, my heart will break!

[*Exit.*

THE VICAR

[*To* RAUTENDELEIN.

Stand here, my child; or, if thou wilt, sit down,
Be good and do the very best thou canst.
Make thyself helpful, while they need thy help.
God will reward thee for the work thou doest.
Thou art greatly changed, dear child, since last I saw thee.
But keep thou honest — be a good, true maid —
For the dear Lord has blessed thee with much beauty.
In truth, my dear, now that I look at thee,
Thou art, yet art not, Anna. As a princess,
Stepped from the pages of some fairy book,
Thou seem'st. So quickly changed! Who would have thought
It possible! Well, well! . . . Thou'lt keep him cool?
He's burning! [*To* HEINRICH.] May God bring thee back to health! [*Exit.*

[RAUTENDELEIN, *who till now has seemed shy and meek, changes suddenly and bustles about the hearth.*

RAUTENDELEIN

Flickering spark in the ash of death,
Glow with life of living breath!
Red, red wind, thy loudest blow!
I, as thou, did lawless grow!
Simmer, sing, and simmer!
[*The flame leaps up on the hearth.*

. . . . . .

Kettle swaying left and right —
Copper-lid, thou'rt none too light!

Bubble, bubble, broth and brew,
Turning all things old to new!
Simmer, sing, and simmer!

. . . . . .

Green and tender herbs of Spring,
In the healing draught I fling.
Drink it sweet, and drink it hot —
Life and youth are in the pot!
Simmer, sing, and simmer!

. . . . . .

And now to scrape the roots and fetch the water.
The cask is empty . . . But we need more light!
[*She throws the window wide open.*
A glorious day! But there'll be wind anon.
A mighty cloud, in shape like some huge fish,
Lies on the hills. To-morrow it will burst;
And roystering spirits will ride madly down,
Sweeping athwart the pines, to reach the vale.
Cuckoo! Cuckoo! . . . Here, too, the cuckoo calls,
And the swift swallow darts across the sky . . .

[Heinrich *has opened his eyes, and lies staring at* Rautendelein.

But now to scrape my roots, and fetch the water.
I've much to do since I turned waiting-maid.
Thou, thou, dear flame, shalt cheer me at my work.

Heinrich

[*Amazed.*

Tell me . . . who art thou?

Rautendelein

[*Quickly and unconcernedly.*

I? Rautendelein.

HEINRICH

Rautendelein? I never heard that name.
Yet somewhere I have seen thee once before.
Where was it?

RAUTENDELEIN

Why, 'twas on the mountain-side.

HEINRICH

True. True. 'Twas there — what time I fevered lay.
I dreamt I saw thee there . . . Again I dream.
At times we dream strange dreams! See. Here's my house.
There burns the fire upon the well-known hearth.
Here lie I, in my bed, sick unto death.
I push the window back. There flies a swallow.
Yonder the nightingales are all at play.
Sweet scents float in — of jasmine . . . elder-blossom . . .
I see . . . I feel . . . I know . . . the smallest thing —
Even to the pattern of this coverlet . . .
Each thread . . . each tiny knot . . . I could describe —
And yet I'm dreaming.

RAUTENDELEIN

Thou art dreaming? Why?

HEINRICH

[*In anguish.*
Because . . . I must be dreaming.

RAUTENDELEIN

Art thou so sure?

HEINRICH

Yes. No. Yes. No. I'm wandering. Let me dream on!
Thou askest if I am so sure. I know not.
Ah, be it what it will: or dream, or life —
It is. I feel it, see it — thou dost live!
Real or unreal, within me or without,
Child of my brain, or whatsoe'er thou art,
Still I do love thee, for thou art thyself.
So stay with me, sweet spirit. Only stay!

RAUTENDELEIN

So long as thou shalt choose.

HEINRICH

Then . . . I do dream.

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Familiarly.*

Take care. Dost see me lift this little foot
With the rosy heel? Thou dost? Why, that is well.
Now — here's a hazel nut. I take it — so —
Between my finger and my dainty thumb —
I set my heel on it. Crack! Now, 'tis broken.
Was that a dream?

HEINRICH

That only God can tell.

RAUTENDELEIN

Now watch me. See. I'll come quite close to thee,
And sit upon thy bed. So. Here I am! . . .
Feasting away as merrily as thou wilt . . .
Hast thou not room enough?

HEINRICH

I've all I need.
But tell me whence thou'rt sprung and who has sent thee!
What would'st thou of a broken, suffering man,
A bundle of sorrow, drawing near the end
Of his brief pilgrimage . . . ?

RAUTENDELEIN

I like thee.
Whence I did spring I know not — nor could tell
Whither I go. But Granny said one day
She found me lying in the moss and weeds.
A hind did give me suck. My home's the wood,
The mountain-side, the crag, the storm-swept moor —
Where the wind moans and rages, shrieks and groans,
Or purrs and mews, like some wild tiger-cat!
There thou wilt find me, whirling through the air;
There I laugh loud and shout for sheer mad joy;
Till faun and nixie, gnome and water-sprite,
Echo my joy and split their sides with laughter.
I'm spiteful when I'm vexed, and scratch and bite:
And who should anger me had best beware.
Yet — 'tis no better when I'm left alone:
For good and bad in me's all mood and impulse.
I'm thus, or thus, and change with each new whim.
But thee I am fond of . . . Thee I would not scratch.
And, if thou wilt, I'll stay. Yet were it best
Thou camest with me to my mountain home.
Then thou should'st see how faithfully I'd serve thee.
I'd show thee diamonds, and rubies rare,
Hid at the bottom of unfathomed deeps.

Emeralds, and topazes, and amethysts —
I'd bring thee all — I'd hang upon thy lids!
Froward, unruly, lazy, I may be;
Spiteful, rebellious, wayward, what thou wilt!
Yet thou shouldst only need to blink thine eye,
And ere thou'dst time to speak, I'd nod thee — yes.
And Granny tells me . . .

HEINRICH

Ah, thou dear, dear child.
Tell me, who is thy Granny?

RAUTENDELEIN

Dost thou not know?

HEINRICH

No.

RAUTENDELEIN

Not know Granny?

HEINRICH

No, I am a man,
And blind.

RAUTENDELEIN

Soon thou shalt see! To me is given
The power to open every eye I kiss
To the most hidden mysteries of earth
And air.

HEINRICH

Then . . . kiss me!

RAUTENDELEIN

Thou'lt keep still?

HEINRICH

Nay, try me!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Kissing his eyes.*

Ye eyes, be opened!

HEINRICH

Ah, thou lovely child,
Sent to enchant me in my dying hour —
Thou fragrant blossom, plucked by God's own hand
In the forgotten dawn of some dead Spring —
Thou free, fair bud — ah, were I but that man
Who, in the morn of life, fared forth so glad —
How I would press thee to this leaping heart!
Mine eyes were blinded. Now, they're filled with light,
And, as by instinct, I divine thy world.
Ay, more and more, as I do drink thee in,
Thou dear enigma, I am sure I see.

RAUTENDELEIN

Why — look at me, then, till thine eyes are tired.

HEINRICH

How golden gleams thy hair! How dazzling bright! . . .
With thee for company, thou dearest dream,
Old Charon's boat becomes a bark for kings,
That spreads its purple sails to catch the sun
Lighting it eastward on its stately way.
Feel'st thou the Western breeze that creeps behind us,
Flecking with foam from tiny waterfalls
The swelling bosom of the blue South seas,
And showering diamonds on us? Dost thou not feel it?
And we, reclining here on cloth of gold,

In blissful certitude of what must be,
Do scan the distance that divides us twain . . .
Thou knowest well from what! . . . For thou hast seen
The fair green island, where the birch bends down,
Bathing its branches in the azure flood —
Thou hearest the glad song of all Spring's choirs,
Waiting to welcome us . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

Yes! Yes! I hear it!

HEINRICH

[*Collapsing.*

So be it. I am ready. When I awake,
A voice shall say to me — Come thou with me.
Then fades the light! . . . Here now the air grows chill.
The seer dies, as the blind man had died.
But I have seen thee . . . seen . . . thee . . . !

RAUTENDELEIN

[*With incantations.*

Master, sleep is thine!
When thou wakest, thou art mine.
Happy dreams shall dull thy pain,
Help to make thee whole again.
[*She bustles about by the hearth.*
Hidden treasures, now grow bright!
In the depths ye give no light.
Glowing hounds in vain do bark,
Whine and whimper in the dark!
We, who serve him, glad will be:
For the Master sets us free!
[*Addressing* HEINRICH, *and with gestures.*
One, two, three. A new man be!
For the future thou art free!

HEINRICH

[*Awaking.*

What's happened to me? . . . From what wondrous sleep
Am I aroused? . . . What is this glorious sun
That, streaming through the window, gilds my hand?
O breath of morning! Heaven, if 'tis thy will —
If 'tis thy strength that rushes through my veins —
If, as a token of thy power, I feel
This strange, new, beating heart within my breast?
Then, should I rise again — again I'd long
To wander out into the world of life:
And wish, and strive, and hope, and dare, and do . . .
And do . . . and do . . . !

[RAUTENDELEIN *has meanwhile moved to right and stands, leaning against the wall, gazing fixedly at* HEINRICH. *A dazzling light falls on her face. Enter* MAGDA.

Ah, Magda. Is it thou?

MAGDA

Is he awake?

HEINRICH

Yes, Magda. Is it thou?

MAGDA.

[*Delightedly.*

How is it with thee?

HEINRICH

[*Overcome with emotion.*

Well. Ah, well! I'll live!
I feel it. I shall live . . . Yes! I shall . . . live!

[*As he speaks, he gazes fixedly, not at* Magda, *but at* Rautendelein, *who stands in an elfin attitude, looking toward him, with an unnatural light on her face.*

Magda.

[*Overjoyed and embracing* Heinrich, *who seems unconscious of her presence.*

He lives! He lives! O dearest Heinrich! Dearest!

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

A deserted glass-works in the mountains, near the snow fields. To the right an earthenware pipe, through which water from the natural rock runs into a natural stone trough. To the left a smith's forge, with chimney and bellows. Through the open entrance to the glass-works at back, left, is seen a mountain landscape, with peaks, moors, and dense fir-woods. Close to the entrance is a precipitous descending slope. In the roof is an outlet for the smoke. At the right the rock forms a rude, pointed vault.

THE WOOD-SPRITE. *After throwing a stump on a heap of pinewood outside, he enters, reluctantly, and looks round.* THE NICKELMANN *rises from the water-trough, remaining immersed up to his breast.*

THE NICKELMANN

Brekekekex! Come in!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

Ah, there thou art!

THE NICKELMANN

Ay. Plague upon this nasty smoke and soot!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

Have they gone out?

THE NICKELMANN
Have who gone out?

THE WOOD-SPRITE
Why — they.

THE NICKELMANN
Yes. I suppose so. Else they would be here.

THE WOOD-SPRITE
I've seen old Horny.

THE NICKELMANN
Ugh!

THE WOOD-SPRITE
. . . With saw and axe.

THE NICKELMANN
What did he say?

THE WOOD-SPRITE
He said . . . thou croakedst much.

THE NICKELMANN
Then let the booby keep his ears closed tight.

THE WOOD-SPRITE
And then he said . . . thou quackedst dismally.

THE NICKELMANN
I'll wring his neck for him.

THE WOOD-SPRITE
And serve him right!

THE NICKELMANN
More necks than one I'd wring —

THE WOOD-SPRITE

[*Laughing.*
Accursèd wight!
He crowds us from our hills. He hacks and hews,
Digs up our metals, sweats, and smelts, and brews.
The earth-man and the water-sprite he takes
To drag his burdens, and, to harness breaks.
Our fairest elf's his sweetheart. As for us,
We must stand by, and watch them — as they buss.
She steals my cherished flowers, my red-brown ores,
My gold, my precious stones, my resinous stores.
She serves him like a slave, by night and day.
'Tis him she kisses — us she keeps at bay.
Naught stands against him. Ancient trees he fells.
The earth quakes at his tread, and all the dells
Ring with the echo of his thunderous blows.
His crimson smithy furnace glows and shines
Into the depths of my most secret mines.
What he is up to, only Satan knows!

THE NICKELMANN

Brekekekex! Hadst thou the creature slain,
A-rotting in the mere long since he had lain —
The maker of the bell, beside the bell.
And so when next I had wished to throw the stones,
The bell had been my box — the dice, his bones!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

By cock and pie! That, truly, had been well.

THE NICKELMANN

But, as it is, he's hale and strong, and works.
Each hammer-stroke my marrow thrills and irks.
[*Whimpering.*

He makes her rings, and chains, and bracelets rare —
Kisses her neck, her breast, her golden hair.

THE WOOD-SPRITE

Now, by my goaty face, thou must be crazed.
An old chap whine and whimper? I'm amazed.
He has a fancy for the child? What then?
'Tis plain she does not love you water-men.
Cheer up! Although she shall not be thy bride,
The sea is deep: the earth is long and wide.
Catch some fair nixie, and your passion slake.
Live like a pacha: riot — be a rake!
Soon thou'lt be cured: and when they hie to bed,
Thou wilt not even turn to wag thy head.

THE NICKELMANN

I'll have his blood, I say! . . .

THE WOOD-SPRITE

She dotes on him.
Thou'rt powerless.

THE NICKELMANN

I will tear him limb from limb!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

She will not have thee, and thy rage is vain.
While Granny stands his friend, thy cries of pain
Will all be wasted. Ay, this loving pair
Is closely guarded. Patience! and beware!

THE NICKELMANN

Patience? I hate the word!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

Time runs on fast:
And men are men. Their passion is soon past.

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Heard singing without.*

A beetle sat in a tree!
Zum! Zum!
A coat all black and white had he!
Zum! Zum!

[*She enters.*

Oho! We've company. Godden, Godden to you.
Hast washed that gold for me, good Nickelmann?
Hast brought the pine-stumps, as I ordered thee,
Dear Goat's-Foot? . . . See: I bend beneath the weight
Of the rare treasures I have found to-day.
Oh, I'm no laggard when I set to work!
Here I have diamonds: here, crystals clear.
This little bag is filled with gold-dust. Look!
And here is honeycomb . . . How warm it grows!

THE NICKELMANN

Warm days are followed by still warmer nights.

RAUTENDELEIN

Maybe. Cold water is thine element:
So get thee whence thou cam'st, and cool thyself.

[THE WOOD-SPRITE *laughs.*

[THE NICKELMANN *sinks silently down into his trough and disappears.*

He will not stop until he's angered me.

THE WOOD-SPRITE

[*Still laughing.*

'Ods bobs!

RAUTENDELEIN

My garter's twisted at the knee!
It cuts me. Oh!

The Wood-Sprite

Shall I untwist it, dear?

Rautendelein

A pretty page thou'dst make! . . . No. Go away.
Thou bring'st ill smells with thee . . . and oh, the gnats!
Why, they are swarming round thee now, in clouds.

The Wood-Sprite

I love them better than the butterflies
That flap their dusty wings about thy face,
Now hanging on thy lips — now on thy hair,
Or clinging to thy hip and breast at night.

Rautendelein

[*Laughing.*

There! That will do. Enough!

The Wood-Sprite

A happy thought!
Give me this cart-wheel! How did it come here?

Rautendelein

That thou couldst answer best, thou mischievous rogue.

The Wood-Sprite

Had I not broken down the dray, I trow,
Thy falcon were not now meshed in thy net.
So give me thanks — and let me take the thing.
I'll have it tied with ropes, and smeared with pitch,
And when it's lighted, I will roll it down
The steepest hillside. Ah! That were a joke!

Rautendelein

Not for the village-folk. Their huts would flame.

The Wood-Sprite

The flame of sacrifice! The red, red wind!

Rautendelein

But I'll not hear of it. So — get thee gone!

The Wood-Sprite

Thou'rt in a hurry? . . . Must I really go?
Then tell me first — what is the Master doing?

Rautendelein

He's working a great work!

The Wood-Sprite

Ah, yes, no doubt!
We know how bells are cast: by day
Ye work — at night, ye kiss and play.
Hill pines for dale, dale pines for hill,
Then, quick, the Master works his will:
A bastard thing, half brute, half God —
The pride of Earth — to Heaven a clod.
Come to the hazelwoods with me!
What he could be to thee, I'll be.
To honor thee shall be my pleasure —
Ape not the Virgin pure, my treasure!

Rautendelein

Thou beast! Thou rogue! I'll blind thy thankless eyes,
Should'st thou not cease that Master to despise
Whose hammer, clanging through the dark, long night,
Strikes to redeem thee! . . . For, without his might,
Thou, I, and all of our unhappy race,
Are curst, and kept beyond the pale of grace.

Yet, stay! . . . Be what thou wilt, thy strength
is vain.
Here he, the Master, and his will, must reign!

The Wood-Sprite

What's that to me? . . . My greeting to thy love.
Some day, thou'lt see, I'll be thy turtle-dove.
[*Exit laughing. Short pause.*

Rautendelein

What ails me? . . . Here the air seems close and
warm.
I'll hie to some cool grot beside the snow.
The dripping water, green and cold as ice,
Will soon refresh me . . . To-day I trod on a
snake,
As it lay sunning itself on a green stone.
It bit at me — up yonder by the falls.
Heigho! How close it is! . . . Steps! . . . Hark!
Who comes?

[*Enter* The Vicar, *in mountain costume. He pants for breath as he stands outside the door.*

The Vicar

Ho! Master Barber! Follow me. This way!
The road was rough. But here I stand, at last.
Well, well. I've come to do God's own good work.
My pains will be repaid a hundred-fold
If, like the Blessèd Shepherd, I should find
One poor, lost sheep, and bring him safely home.
So, courage! Courage! [*He enters.*] Is there
no one here?

[*He sees* Rautendelein.

Ah, there thou art. I might have known as much!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Pale and angry.*

What do you seek?

THE VICAR

That thou shalt quickly learn.
Ay, soon enough, as God shall be my witness.
Give me but time to get my breath again
And dry my face a bit. And now, my child —
I pray thee, tell me — art thou here alone?

RAUTENDELEIN

Thou hast no right to question me!

THE VICAR

Oho!
A pretty answer, truly. But thou art frank —
Thou showest me thy very self at once.
So much the better. Now my course is plain.
Thou creature! . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

Man, beware!

THE VICAR

[*Folding his hands and approaching her.*
I fear thee not!
My heart is pure and true. Thou canst not harm me.
He who did give my poor old limbs the strength
To brave thee in thy hidden mountain home
Will not forsake me now. Thou devilish thing,
Think not to daunt me with thy scornful glance —
Waste thy infernal witchcraft not on me!
Thou — thou hast lured him hither — to thy hills!

RAUTENDELEIN

Whom?

THE VICAR

Whom? Why, Master Heinrich. Canst thou ask?
With magic spells, and sweet unhallowed draughts,
Thou hast witched him, till he obeys thee like a dog.
A man so upright, pious to the core;
A father and a husband! Thou great God!
This mountain trull had but to raise her hand
And, in a trice, she had tied him to her skirts,
Dragged him away with her, where'er she pleased,
Shaming the honour of all Christendom.

RAUTENDELEIN

If I'm a robber, 'twas not thee I robbed!

THE VICAR

What! 'Tis not me thou hast robbed? Thou insolent jade,
Not me alone, not only his wife and boys —
No — all mankind thou hast cheated of this man!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Suddenly transformed and in triumph.*
Ah, look before thee! See who comes this way!
Dost thou not hear the free and even sound
Of his firm footsteps? Shall thy sland'rous flouts
Not even now be turned to joyous shouts?
Dost thou not feel my Balder's conqu'ring glance
Dart through thy soul, and stir thee, as the dance?
The grass his foot treads down is proud and glad.
A King draws nigh! Thou, beggarly wretch, art sad?
Hail! Hail! O Master, Master! Thee I greet!

[*She runs to meet* HEINRICH, *and throws herself into his arms as he enters.*

[HEINRICH *is attired in a picturesque working costume. In his hand he holds a*

hammer. He enters hand in hand with Rautendelein, *and recognises* The Vicar.

Heinrich

Welcome! Thrice welcome, friend!

The Vicar

Now God be praised!
Belovèd Master: is it yourself I see?
You, who but lately came so near to death,
Now stand before me, beaming with rude strength,
Straight as a stout young beech, and hale and well —
You, who did seem a sickly, tottering man,
Hopeless, and ageing? What has wrought this change?
How, in a moment, has the grace of God,
With but a puff of His all-quickening breath,
Helped you to spring from your sick-bed to life,
Ready to dance, as David danced, and sing,
Praising the Lord, your Saviour and your King!

Heinrich

'Tis even as you say.

The Vicar

You are a marvel!

Heinrich

That also is true. In all my frame I feel
Wonders are being worked.
[*To* Rautendelein.
Go thou, my dear.
The Vicar must be thirsty. Bring some wine.

The Vicar

I thank you. But — I will not drink to-day.

HEINRICH

Go. Bring the wine. I'll vouch for it. 'Tis good.
Well — as you please. I pray you, do not stand.
This is my first encounter with a friend
Since I released myself from the distress
And shame that sickness brings. I had not hoped
To welcome you, before all others, here —
Within the narrow sphere that bounds my work.
Now am I doubly glad: for now 'tis clear
You have learned what strength, and love, and duty mean.
I see you breaking, with one resolute blow,
The murderous chains of worldly interest —
Fleeing mankind, to seek the one true God.

THE VICAR

Now, God be thanked! You are the old, true Heinrich.
They lied, who, in the valley, had proclaimed
You were no more the man that once we knew.

HEINRICH

That man am I, and yet . . . another man.
Open the windows — Light and God stream in!

THE VICAR

A goodly saying.

HEINRICH

Ay. The best I know.

THE VICAR

I know some better. Yet your saying's good.

HEINRICH

Then, if you are ready, give me your right hand.
I swear, by Cock and Swan and Head of Horse,

With all my soul to serve you as your friend.
I'll open to you wide the gates of Spring —
The Spring that fills my heart.

THE VICAR

Do as you say.
'Twill not be the first time. You know me well.

HEINRICH

I know you. Yes. And though I knew you not,
Yea, though a vulgar soul your face should hide,
So boundless is my craving to do good,
That I — Enough. Gold always will be gold.
And even on the souls of sycophants
Good seed's not wasted.

THE VICAR

Master, tell me this:
What was the meaning of your curious oath?

HEINRICH

By Cock and Swan?

THE VICAR

Ay; and by Head of Horse?

HEINRICH

I know not how the words came to my lips . . .
Methinks . . . the weathercock on your church steeple —
The horse's head upon your neighbor's roof —
The swan that soared into the bright blue sky —
Or . . . something else — was in my mind just then.
What does it matter? . . . Ah, here comes the wine.
Now, in the deepest sense of every word,
I drink to our good health . . . yours . . . thine . . . and mine.

The Vicar

I thank you: and once more I wish good health
To him who has so wondrously been healed.

Heinrich

[*Pacing to and fro.*

Yes. I am healed — indeed. I feel it here —
Here, in my breast, that swells as I draw in
Strength and new rapture with each living breath.
It is as though the very youth of May
Gladdened my heart and streamed into my being.
I feel it in my arm — 'tis hard as steel;
And in my hand, that, as the eagle's claw,
Clutches at empty air, and shuts again,
Wild with impatience to achieve great deeds.
Saw you the sanctuary in my garden?

The Vicar

What do you mean?

Heinrich

There! . . . 'Tis another marvel. Look!

The Vicar

I see nothing.

Heinrich

I mean yonder tree,
That seems so like a glowing evening-cloud.
For the god Freyr once rested in its boughs.
From its green branches, and from round its stem,
Comes the voluptuous hum of countless bees —
Hark how they buzz and swarm about the flowers
Eager to sip sweet draughts from every bud!
I feel that I am like that wondrous tree . . .
Even as he came down into those boughs,

So did the god descend into my soul,
And, in an instant, it was all a-bloom.
If any bees go thirsting, let them suck!

The Vicar

Go on, go on, my friend. I love to listen.
You and your blossoming tree indeed may boast.
Whether your fruit shall ripen, rests with God!

Heinrich

Surely, dear friend. Does He not order all?
He hurled me down the precipice. 'Twas He
Who raised me up and caused my life to bloom.
He made the fruit, and flowers, and all that grows.
Yet — pray that He may bless my new-born Summer!
What's germed within me's worthy of the blessing —
Worthy of ripening: really and indeed.
It is a work like none I had yet conceived;
A chime, of all the noblest metals wrought,
That, of itself, shall ring and, ringing, live.
If I but put my hand up to my ear,
Straightway I hear it sing. I close my eyes —
Form after form at once grows palpable.
Behold! What now is freely given to me.
Of old — when ye were wont to acclaim me "Master"—
In nameless agony, I vainly sought.
I was no Master then, nor was I happy.
Now am I both; I am happy and a Master!

The Vicar

I love to hear men call you by that name.
Yet it seems strange that you yourself should do so.
For what church are you making your great work?

HEINRICH

For no church.

THE VICAR

Then — who ordered it, my friend?

HEINRICH

He who commanded yonder pine to rise
In strength and majesty beside the abyss! . . .
But — seriously: the little church you had built
Lies half in ruins — half it has been burned.
So I must find a new place on the heights:
A new place, for a new, a nobler, temple!

THE VICAR

O Master, Master! . . . But, I will not argue.
Perchance we have misunderstood each other.
To put things plainly, what I mean is this:
As your new work must cost so very dear . . .

HEINRICH

Yes. It is costly.

THE VICAR

Such a chime as yours . . .

HEINRICH

Oh, call it what you will.

THE VICAR

You said — a chime?

HEINRICH

A name I gave to that which none may name,
Nor can, nor shall baptise, except itself.

THE VICAR

And tell me, pray — who pays you for your work?

HEINRICH

Who pays me for my work? Oh, Father!
Father!
Would you give joy to joy — add gold to gold? . . .
If I so named it, and the name you love —
Call my great work — a chime! . . . But 'tis a
chime
Such as no minster in the world has seen.
Loud and majestic is its mighty voice.
Even as the thunder of a storm it sounds,
Rolling and crashing o'er the meads in Spring.
Ay, in the tumult of its trumpet-tones,
All the church-bells on earth it shall strike dumb.
All shall be hushed, as through the sky it rings
The glad new Gospel of the new-born light!

. . . . . .

Eternal Sun! * Thy children, and my children,
Know thee for Father, and proclaim thy power.
Thou, aided by the kind and gentle rain,
Didst raise them from the dust and give them
health!
So now — their joy triumphant they shall send
Singing along thy clear, bright path to Heaven!
And now, at last, like the grey wilderness
That thou hast warmed, and mantled with thy
green,
Me thou hast kindled into sacrifice!
I offer thee myself, and all I am! . . .
O Day of Light — when, from the marble halls
Of my fair Temple, the first waking peal
Shall shake the skies — when, from the sombre
clouds
That weighed upon us through the winter night,

* In the German the Sun is feminine. The original passage has consequently been modified.

Rivers of jewels shall go rushing down
Into a million hands outstretched to clutch!
Then all who drooped, with sudden power inflamed,
Shall bear their treasure homeward to their huts,
There to unfurl, at last, the silken banners,
Waiting — so long, so long — to be upraised,
And, pilgrims of the Sun, draw near the Feast!

. . . . . .

O, Father, that great Day! . . . You know the tale
Of the lost Prodigal? . . . It is the Sun
That bids his poor, lost children to my Feast.
With rustling banners, see the swelling host
Draw nearer, and still nearer to my Temple.
And now the wondrous chime again rings out,
Filling the air with such sweet, passionate sound
As makes each breast to sob with rapturous pain.
It sings a song, long lost and long forgotten,
A song of home — a childlike song of Love,
Born in the waters of some fairy well —
Known to all mortals, and yet heard of none!
And as it rises, softly first, and low,
The nightingale and dove seem singing, too;
And all the ice in every human breast
Is melted, and the hate, and pain, and woe,
Stream out in tears.

. . . . . .

Then shall we all draw nearer to the Cross,
And, still in tears, rejoice, until at last
The dead Redeemer, by the Sun set free,
His prisoned limbs shall stir from their long sleep,
And, radiant with the joy of endless youth,
Come down, Himself a youth, into the May!

[Heinrich's *enthusiasm has swelled as he*

has spoken the foregoing speech, till at last it has become ecstatic. He walks to and fro. Rautendelein, *who has been silently watching him all this time, showing her love and adoration by the changing expression of her face, now approaches* Heinrich, *with tears in her eyes, kneels beside him, and kisses his hand.* The Vicar *has listened to* Heinrich *with growing pain and horror. Towards the end of* Heinrich's *speech he has contained himself with difficulty. After a brief pause he answers. At first he speaks with enforced calm. Gradually, however, his feeling carries him away.*

The Vicar

And now, dear Master, I have heard you out:
Now every syllable those worthy men
Had told me of your state, alas, is proved.
Yea, even to the story of this chime of bells.
I cannot tell you all the pain I feel! . . .
A truce to empty words! If here I stand,
'Tis not because I thirsted for your marvels.
No! 'Tis to help you in your hour of need!

Heinrich

My need? . . . And so you think I am in need?

The Vicar

Man! Man! Bestir yourself. Awake! You dream!
A dreadful dream, from which you'll surely wake
To everlasting sorrow. Should I fail

To rouse you, with God's wise and holy words,
You are lost, ay, lost for ever, Master Heinrich!

HEINRICH

I do not think so.

THE VICAR

What saith the Good Book? *
"Those whom He would destroy, He first doth blind."

HEINRICH

If God so willed it — you'd resist in vain.
Yet, should I own to blindness,
Filled as I feel myself with pure, new life,
Bedded upon a glorious morning cloud,
Whence with new eyes I drink in all the heavens;
Why, then, indeed, I should deserve God's curse,
And endless Darkness.

THE VICAR

Master Heinrich — friend,
I am too humble to keep pace with you.
A simple man am I — a child of Earth:
The superhuman lies beyond my grasp.
But one thing I do know, though you forget,
That wrong is never right, nor evil, good.

HEINRICH

And Adam did not know so much in Eden!

THE VICAR

Fine phrases, sounding well, but meaningless.
They will not serve to cloak your deadly sin.
It grieves me sore — I would have spared you this.
You have a wife, and children . . .

* So it stands in the original.

HEINRICH

Well — what more?

THE VICAR

You shun the church, take refuge in the mountains;
This many a month you have not seen the home
Where your poor wife sits sighing, while, each day,
Your children drink their lonely mother's tears!

[*A long pause.*]

HEINRICH

[*With emotion.*

Could I but wipe away those sorrowful tears,
How gladly would I do it! . . . But I cannot.
In my dark hours, I've digged into my soul,
Only to feel, I have no power to dry them.
I, who am now all love, in love renewed,
Out of the overflowing wealth I own,
May not fill up their cup! For, lo, my wine
Would be to them but bitter gall and venom!
Should he whose hand is as the eagle's claw
Stroke a sick child's wet cheek? . . . Here none but God
Could help!

THE VICAR

For this there is no name but madness,
And wicked madness. Yes. I speak the truth.
Here stand I, Master, overcome with horror
At the relentless cruelty of your heart.
Now Satan, aping God, hath dealt a blow —
Yes, I must speak my mind — a blow so dread
That even he must marvel at his triumph.
That work, Almighty God, whereof he prates —

Do I not know 't? . . . 'Tis the most awful crime
Ever was hatched within a heathen brain!
Far rather would I see the dreadful plagues
Wherewith the Lord once scourged rebellious Egypt
Threaten our Christendom, than watch your Temple
Rise to the glory of Beelzebub.
Awake! Arise! Come back, my son, to Christ!
It is not yet too late! Cast out this witch!
Renounce this wanton hag — ay, cast her out!
This elf, this sorceress, this cursèd sprite!
Then in a trice, the evil spell shall fade
And vanish into air. You shall be saved!

Heinrich

What time I fevered lay, a prey to death,
She came, and raised me up, and made me well.

The Vicar

'Twere better you had died — than live like this!

Heinrich

Why, as to that, think even as you will.
But, as for me — I took life's burden up.
I live anew, and, till death comes, must thank
Her who did give me life.

The Vicar

Now — I have done!
Too deep, yea to the neck, you are sunk in sin!
Your Hell, decked out in beauty as high Heaven,
Shall hold you fast. I will not waste more words.
Yet mark this, Master: witches make good fuel,
Even as heretics, for funeral-pyres.
Vox populi, vox Dei! Your ill deeds,
Heathen, and secret once, are now laid bare.

Horror they wake, and soon there shall come hate.
So it may happen that the storm, long-curbed,
All bounds shall overleap, and that the people
Whom you have outraged in their holiest faith,
Shall rise against you in their own defense,
And crush you ruthlessly!

[*Pause.*]

HEINRICH

[*Calmly.*
And now hear me . . .
I fear you not! . . . Should they who panting lie
Dash from my hand the cup of cooling wine
I bore to them: if they would rather thirst —
Why, then, it is their will — perhaps their fate —
And none may justly charge me with their act.
I am no longer thirsty. I have drunk.
If it is fitting that, of all men, you —
Who have closed your eyes against the truth — should be
That man who now assails so hatefully
The blameless cup-bearer, and flings the mud
Of Darkness 'gainst his soul, where all is light:
Yet I am I! . . . What I would work, I know.
And if, ere now, full many a faulty bell
My stroke has shattered, once again will I
Swing my great hammer for a mightier blow,
Dealt at another bell the mob has made —
Fashioned of malice, gall, and all ill things,
Last but not least among them ignorance.

THE VICAR

Then, go your way! Farewell. My task is done.
The hemlock of your sin no man may hope
To rid your soul of. May God pity you!
But this remember! There's a word named rue!

And some day, some day, as your dreams you dream,
A sudden arrow, shot from out the blue,
Shall pierce your breast! And yet you shall not die,
Nor shall you live. In that dread day you'll curse
All you now cherish — God, the world, your work,
Your wretched self you'll curse. Then . . . think of me!

HEINRICH

Had I a fancy to paint phantoms, Vicar,
I'd be more skillful in the art than you.
The things you rave of never shall come true,
And I am guarded well against your arrow.
No more it frets me, nor my heart can shake,
Than that old bell, which in the water rolled —
Where it lies buried now, and hushed — forever!

THE VICAR

That bell shall toll again! Then think of me!

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

The glass-works as in Act Three. A rude door has been hewn out of the rocky wall at the right. Through this, access is obtained to a mountain-cave. At the left the open forge, with bellows and chimney. The fire is lighted. Near the forge stands an anvil.

HEINRICH, *at the anvil, on which he is laying a bar of red-hot iron which he holds tight with his tongs. Near him stand six little* DWARFS *attired as mountaineers. The* FIRST DWARF *holds the tongs with* HEINRICH; *the* SECOND DWARF *lifts the great forge hammer and brings it down with a ringing blow on the iron. The* THIRD DWARF *works the bellows. The* FOURTH DWARF *stands motionless, intently watching the progress of the work. The* FIFTH DWARF *stands by, waiting. In his hand he holds a club, ready to strike. The* SIXTH DWARF *sits perched on the stump of a tree. On his head he wears a glittering crown. Here and there lie fragments of forged iron and castings, models and plans.*

HEINRICH

[*To* SECOND DWARF.

Strike hard! Strike harder! Till thy arm hangs limp.
Thy whimpering does not move me, thou poor sluggard —

Shouldst thou relax before the time I set,
I'll singe thy beard for thee in these red flames.

[Second Dwarf *throws his hammer down.*

Oho! 'Tis as I thought. Well, wait, thou imp!
And thou shalt see I mean what I have threaten'd!

[Second Dwarf *struggles and screams as* Heinrich *holds him over the fire.* Third Dwarf *goes to work more busily than ever at the bellows.*

First Dwarf

[*With the tongs.*

I can't hold on. My hand is stiff, great Master!

Heinrich

I'm coming.

[*He turns to* Second Dwarf.

Well, dost thou feel stronger now?

[Second Dwarf *nods reassuringly, and hammers away for dear life.*

Heinrich

By Cock and Swan! I'll have no mercy on you!

[*He clutches the tongs again.*

No blacksmith living could a horseshoe shape
An he should stand on trifles with such rogues.
No sooner have they struck the first good stroke
When off they'd go, and leave the rest to chance.
And as for counting on them for the zeal
That spurs an honest workman to attempt
Ten thousand miracles — why, 'twould be mad.
To work! To work! Hot iron bends — not cold!

[*To* First Dwarf.

What art thou at?

First Dwarf

[*Busily trying to mould the red-hot iron with his hand.*

I'm moulding it with my hand.

Heinrich

Thou reckless fool. What? Hast thou lost thy wits?
Wouldst thou reduce thy clumsy paw to ashes?
Thou wretched dwarf, if thou shouldst fail me now,
What power had I? . . . Without thy helping art,
How could I hope to see my cherished work
Rise from the summit of my temple towers
Into the free and sunlit air of heaven?

First Dwarf

The iron is well forged. The hand is whole —
Deadened and numbed a little: that is all.

Heinrich

Off to the well with thee! The Nickelmann
Will cool thy fingers with his water-weeds.

[*To the* Second Dwarf.

Now take the rest thou'st earned, thou lazy imp,
And make the most of it. I'll comfort seek
In the reward that comes of honest effort.

[*He picks up the newly forged iron, sits, and examines it.*

Ah, here's rare work for you! The kindly powers
Have crowned our labor with this good result.
I am content. Methinks I have cause to be,
Since, out of shapelessness, a shape has grown,
And, out of chaos, this rare masterpiece:
Nicely proportioned — here . . . above . . . below . . .

Just what was needed to complete the work.

[*The* Fourth Dwarf *clambers on to a stool and whispers in* Heinrich's *ear.*

What art thou muttering, imp? Disturb me not,
Lest I should tie thy hands and feet together,
And clap a gag into thy chattering throat!

[Dwarf *retreats in alarm.*

What's out of joint in the great scheme? What's wrong?
What irks thee? Speak when thou art questioned, dwarf!
Never as now was I so filled with joy;
Never were heart and hand more surely one.
What art thou grumbling at? Am I not Master?
Wouldst thou, poor hireling, dare to vie with me?
Well — out with it! Thy meaning — Speak! Be plain!

[Dwarf *returns and whispers.* Heinrich *turns pale, sighs, rises, and angrily lays the iron on the anvil.*

Then may the Devil end this work himself!
I'll grow potatoes, and plant cabbages.
I'll eat and drink and sleep, and then — I'll die!

[Fifth Dwarf *approaches the anvil.*

Thou, fellow, do not dare to lay thy hand on 't!
Ay, burst with fury, an thou wilt. I care not.
And let thy hair stand straight on end — thy glance
Dart death. Thou rogue! Who yields but once to thee,
Or fails to hold thee tightly in his clutch,
Might just as well bow down and be thy slave,
And wait till, with thy club, thou end his pain!

[Fifth Dwarf *angrily shatters the iron*

on the anvil; Heinrich *grinds his teeth with rage.*

Well, well! Run riot! No more work to-night.
A truce to duty. Get ye hence, ye dwarfs!
Should morning, as I hope, put fresh, new life
Into this frame of mine — I'll call ye back.
Go! — Work unbidden would avail me naught.
[*To* Third Dwarf.
Come — drop thy bellows, dwarf. With all thy might,
Thou'dst hardly heat me a new iron to-night.
Away! Away!
[*All the* Dwarfs, *with the exception of the one with the crown, vanish through the door, right.*
And thou, crowned King, who only once shalt speak —
Why dost thou linger? Get thee gone, I say.
Thou wilt not speak to-day, nor yet to-morrow:
Heaven only knows if thou wilt ever speak!
My work! . . . My work! When will it end! . . . I'm tired!
I love thee not, sad twilight hour, that liest
Pressed 'twixt the dying day and growing night,
Thou wringest from my nerveless hand the hammer,
Yet bring'st me not the sleep, the dreamless sleep,
That gives men rest. A heart athirst for work
Knows it must wait, and wait in idleness:
And so — in pain — it waits . . . for the new day.
The sun, wrapped round in purple, slowly sinks
Into the depths . . . and leaves us here alone.
While we, who are used to light, look helpless on,
And, stripped of everything, must yield to night.

Rags are the coverlets that cloak our sleep.
At noon we're kings . . . at dusk we're only beggars.

[*He throws himself on a couch and lies dreaming, with wide-open eyes. A white mist comes in through the open door. When it disappears,* The Nickelmann *is discovered leaning over the edge of the water-trough.*

The Nickelmann

Quorax! . . . Brekekekex! . . . So there he lies —
This Master Earth-Worm—in his mossgrown house.
He's deaf and blind, while crookback imps do creep
Like the grey mists upon the mountain-side.
Now they uplift their shadowy hands, and threaten!
Now they go wringing them, as though in pain!
He sleeps! He does not heed the moaning pines;
The low, malignant piping of the elves
That makes the oldest fir-trees quake and thrill,
And, like a hen that flaps her foolish wings,
Beat their own boughs against their quivering flanks . . . !
Now, he grows chiller, as the winter-grey
Searches the marrow in his bones. And still,
Even in sleep, he toils!
Give over, fool! Thou canst not fight with God!
'Twas God that raised thee up, to prove thy strength;
And now, since thou art weak, He casts thee down!

[Heinrich *tosses about and moans in his sleep.*

Vain is thy sacrifice. For Sin is Sin.

Thou hast not wrung from God the right to change
Evil to good — or wages give to guilt.
Thou'rt foul with stains. Thy garments reek with blood.
Now, call thou ne'er so loud, the gentle hand
That might have washed thee clean, thou'lt never see!
Black spirits gather in the hills and dales.
Soon in thine anguished ear the sound shall ring
Of the wild huntsmen and the baying hounds!
They know what game they hunt! . . . And now, behold!
The giant builders of the air upraise
Castles of cloud, with monstrous walls and towers.
Frowning and grim, they move against thy heights,
Eager to crush thy work, and thee, and all!

Heinrich

Rautendelein! Help! The nightmare! Oh, I choke!

The Nickelmann

She hears thee — and she comes — but brings no help!
Though she were Freya, and though thou wert Balder —
Though sun-tipped shafts did fill thy radiant quiver,
And ev'ry shaft that thou shouldst point went home —
Thou must be vanquished. Hear me!

A sunken bell in the deep mere lies,
Under the rocks and the rolling:

And it longs to rise —
In the sunlight again to be tolling!
The fishes swim in, and the fishes swim out,
As the old bell tosses, and rolls about.
It shudders and sways as they come and go,
And weeping is heard, and the sound of woe.
A muffled moan, and a throb of pain,
Answer the swirling flood —
For the mouth of the bell is choked with blood!
Woe, woe, to thee, man, when it tolls again!
Bim! . . . Boom!
The Lord save thee from thy doom!
Bim! . . . Boom!
Hark to the knell!
Death is the burden of that lost bell!
Bim! . . . Boom!
The Lord save thee from thy doom!

[The Nickelmann *sinks into the well.*

Heinrich

Help! Help! A nightmare chokes me! Help! Help! Help!

[*He awakes.*

Where am I? . . . Am I living?

[*He rubs his eyes and looks round him.*

No one here?

Rautendelein

[*Entering.*

I'm here! Did'st call?

Heinrich

Yes! Come! Come here to me.
Lay thy dear hand upon my forehead — so,
And let me stroke thy hair . . . and feel thy heart.

Come. Nearer. In thy train thou bring'st the scent
Of the fresh woods and rosemary. Ah, kiss me!
Kiss me!

RAUTENDELEIN

What ails thee, dearest?

HEINRICH

Nothing, nothing!
Give me a coverlet . . . I lay here chilled . . .
Too tired to work . . . My heart grew faint . . . and then
Dark powers of evil seemed to enter in . . .
Laid hold of me, possessed me, plagued me sore,
And tried to throttle me . . . But now I'm well.
Have thou no fear, child. I'm myself again!
Now let them come!

RAUTENDELEIN

Who?

HEINRICH

Why, my foes.

RAUTENDELEIN

What foes?

HEINRICH

My nameless enemies — ay, one and all!
I stand upon my feet, as once I stood,
Ready to brave them, though they filled my sleep
With crawling, creeping, cowardly terrors full!

RAUTENDELEIN

Thou'rt fevered, Heinrich!

HEINRICH

Ay, 'tis chill to-night.
No matter. Put thy arms around me. So.

RAUTENDELEIN

Thou, dearest, dearest!

HEINRICH

Tell me this, my child.
Dost trust in me?

RAUTENDELEIN

Thou Balder! Hero! God!
I press my lips against the fair white brow
That overhangs the clear blue of thine eyes.

[*Pause.*]

HEINRICH

So — I am all thou say'st? . . . I am thy Balder?
Make me believe it — make me know it, child!
Give my faint soul the rapturous joy it needs,
To nerve it to its task. For, as the hand,
Toiling with tong and hammer, on and on,
To hew the marble and to guide the chisel,
Now bungles here, now there, yet may not halt,
And nothing, small or great, dare leave to chance,
So do we ofttimes lose our passionate faith,
Feel the heart tighten, and the eyes grow dim,
Till, in the daily round of drudging work,
The clear projection of the soul doth vanish.
For, to preserve that Heaven-sent gift is hard.
No clamp have we, no chain, to hold it fast.
'Tis as the aura that surrounds a sun,
Impalpable. That being lost, all's lost.
Defrauded now we stand, and tempted sore
To shirk the anguish that foreruns fruition.
What, in conception, seemed all ecstasy,
Now turns to sorrow. But — enough of this.
Still straight and steady doth the smoke ascend
From my poor human sacrifice to Heaven.

Should now a Hand on high reject my gift,
Why, it may do so. Then the priestly robe
Falls from my shoulder — by no act of mine;
While I, who erst upon the heights was set,
Must look my last on Horeb, and be dumb!
But now bring torches! Lights! And show thine art
Enchantress! Fill the winecup! We will drink!
Ay, like the common herd of mortal men,
With resolute hands our fleeting joy we'll grip!
Our unsought leisure we will fill with life,
Not waste it, as the herd, in indolence.
We will have music!

RAUTENDELEIN

O'er the hills I flew:
Now, as a cobweb, on the breezes drifting,
Now frolicking as a bee, or butterfly,
And darting hungrily from flower to flower.
From each and all, from every shrub and plant,
Each catch-fly, harebell, and forget-me-not,
I dragged the promise, and I forced the oath,
That bound them never to do harm to thee.
And so — the blackest elf, most bitter foe
To thee, so good and white, should vainly seek
To cut thy death-arrow! *

HEINRICH

What is this arrow?
I know the spirit! . . . Yes, I know 't! . . .
There came
A spirit to me once, in priestly garb,
Who, threat'ning, raised his hand, the while he raved

* It was an old belief that dangerous arrows were shot down from the air by elves.

Of some such arrow that should pierce my heart.
Who'll speed the arrow from his bow, I say?
Who — who will dare?

RAUTENDELEIN

Why, no one, dearest. No one.
Thou'rt proof against all ill, I say — thou'rt proof.
And now, blink but thine eye, or only nod,
And gentle strains shall upward float, as mist,
Hem thee about, and, with a wall of music,
Guard thee from call of man, and toll of bell:
Yea, mock at even Loki's mischievous arts.
Make the most trifling gesture with thy hand,
These rocks shall turn to vaulted palace-halls,
Earth-men unnumbered shall buzz round, and stand
Ready to deck the floor, the walls, the board!
Yet — since by dark, fierce foes we are beset,
Wilt thou not flee into the earth with me?
There we need fear no icy giant's breath —
There the vast halls shall shine with dazzling light —

HEINRICH

Peace, child. No more. What were thy feast to me
So long as solemn, mute, and incomplete,
My work the hour awaits, wherein its voice
Shall loudly usher in the Feast of Feasts! . . .
I'll have one more good look at the great structure.
So shall new fetters bind me to it fast.
Take thou a torch, and light me on my way.
Haste! Haste! . . . Since now I feel my nameless foes
Busy at work to do me injury —

Since now the fabric's menaced at the base —
'Tis meet the Master, too, should toil — not revel.
For, should success his weary labour crown,
The secret wonder stand at last revealed,
In gems and gold expressed, and ivory,
Even to the faintest, feeblest, of its tones —
His work should live, triumphant, through the ages!
'Tis imperfection that draws down the curse,
Which, could we brave it here, we'd make a mock of.
Ay, we will make a mock of 't!
[*He moves to the door and halts.*
Well, child? . . .
Why dost thou linger! . . . Have I grieved thee?

RAUTENDELEIN

No!
No! No!

HEINRICH

What ails thee?

RAUTENDELEIN

Nothing!

HEINRICH

Thou poor soul!
I know what grieves thee.— Children, such as thou,
Run lightly after the bright butterflies,
And often, laughing, kill what most they love.
But I am not a butterfly. I am more.

RAUTENDELEIN

And I? Am I a child? . . . No more than that?

HEINRICH

Ay, truly, thou art more! . . . That to forget

Were to forget the brightness of my life.
The dew that glistened in thy shining eyes
Filled me with pain. And then I pained thee, too.
Come! 'Twas my tongue, not I, that hurt thee so.
My heart of hearts knows naught, save only love.
Nay — do not weep so. See — now I am armed;
Thou hast equipped me for the game anew.
Lo, thou hast filled my empty hands with gold;
Given me courage for one more last throw!
Now I can play with Heaven! . . . Ah, and I feel
So blessed, so wrapped in thy strange loveliness —
Yet, when I, wond'ring, seek to grasp it all,
I am baffled. For thy charm's unsearchable.
And then I feel how near joy's kin to pain —
Lead on! And light my path!

The Wood-Sprite

[*Without.*

Ho! Holdrio!
Up! Up! Bestir yourselves! Plague o' the dawdlers!
The heathen temple must be laid in ashes!
Haste, reverend sir! Haste, Master Barber, haste!
Here there is straw and pitch a-plenty. See!
The Master's cuddling his fair elfin bride —
And while he toys with her, naught else he heeds.

Heinrich

The deadly nightshade must have made him mad.
What art thou yelling in the night, thou rogue?
Beware!

The Wood-Sprite

[*Defiantly.*

Of thee?

Heinrich

Ay, fool. Beware of me!

I know the way to manage such as thou,
I'll grab thee by thy beard, thou misshaped oaf;
Thou shalt be shorn and stripped, and when thou'rt tamed,
When thou hast learned to know who's master here,
I'll make thee work and slave for me — thou goat-shank!
What? . . . Neighing, eh? . . . Dost see this anvil, beast?
And, here, this hammer? It is hard enough
To beat thee to a jelly.

THE WOOD-SPRITE

[*Turning his back on* HEINRICH *insolently.*
Bah! Hammer away!
Many and many a zealot's flashing sword
Has tickled me, ere it was turned to splinters.
The iron on thy anvil's naught but clay,
And, like a cow's dug, at the touch it bursts.

HEINRICH

We'll see, thou windbag, thou hobgoblin damned!
Wert thou as ancient as the Wester wood,
Or did thy power but match thy braggart tongue —
I'll have thee chained, and make thee fetch and carry,
Sweep, drudge, draw water, roll huge stones and rocks,
And shouldst thou loiter, beast, I'll have thee flayed!

RAUTENDELEIN

Heinrich! He warns thee!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

Ay! Go to! Go to!

'Twill be a mad game when they drag thee hence
And roast thee, like an ox! And I'll be by!
But now to find the brimstone, oil, and pitch,
Wherewith to make a bonfire that shall smoke
Till daylight shall be blotted out in darkness.

[*Exit.*

[*Cries and murmurs of many voices heard from below, without.*

RAUTENDELEIN

Dost thou not hear them, Heinrich? Men are coming!
Hark to their boding cries! . . . They are for thee!

[*A stone flung from without strikes* RAUTENDELEIN.

Help, grandmother!

HEINRICH

So that is what was meant!
I dreamed a pack of hounds did hunt me down.
The hounds I hear. The hunt has now begun!
Their yelping, truly, could not come more pat.
For, though an angel had hung down from Heaven,
All lily-laden, and, with gentle sighs,
Entreated me to tireless steadfastness,
He had convinced me less than those fierce cries
Of the great weight and purport of my mission.
Come one, come all! What's yours I guard for you!
I'll shield you from yourselves! . . . Be that my watchword!

[*Exit with hammer.*

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Alone and in excitement.*

Help, help, Bush-Grandmother! Help, Nickelmann!

[The Nickelmann *rises from the well.*

Ah, my dear Nickelmann, I beg of you —
Bid water, quick, come streaming from all the rocks,
Wave upon wave, and drive them all away!
Do! Do!

The Nickelmann

Brekekekex! What shall I do?

Rautendelein

Let thy wild waters sweep them to the abyss!

The Nickelmann

I cannot.

Rautendelein

But thou canst, good Nickelmann!

The Nickelmann

And if I should — what good were that to me?
I have no cause to wish well to the Master.
He'd love to lord it over God and men.
'Twould suit me if the fools should strike him down!

Rautendelein

Oh, help him — help! Or it will be too late!

The Nickelmann

What wilt thou give me, dear?

Rautendelein

I give thee?

The Nickelmann

Yes.

Rautendelein

Ah, what thou wilt!

THE NICKELMANN

Oho! Brekekekex!
Then strip thy pretty gown from thy brown limbs,
Take off thy crimson shoon, thy dainty cap.
Be what thou art! Come down into my well —
I'll spirit thee a thousand leagues away.

RAUTENDELEIN

Forsooth! How artfully he'd made his plans!
But now I tell thee once, and once for all;
Thou'dst better clear thy pate of all thy schemes.
For, shouldst thou live to thrice thy hoary age —
Shouldst thou grow old as Granny — shouldst thou forever
Prison me close in thine own oyster shells,
I would not look at thee!

THE NICKELMANN

Then . . . he must die.

RAUTENDELEIN

Thou liest! . . . I'm sure of 't. Thou liest! Hark!
Ah, well thou knowest his clear-sounding voice!
Dost think I do not see thee shrink in fear?

[THE NICKELMANN *disappears in the well.*

[*Enter* HEINRICH *in triumph, and flushed with the excitement of the strife. He laughs.*

HEINRICH

They came at me like hounds, and, even as hounds,
I drove them from me with the flaming brands!
Great boulders then I rolled upon their heads:
Some perished — others fled! Come — give me drink!
War cools the breast —'tis steeled by victory.

The warm blood rushes through my veins. Once more
My pulse throbs joyously. War does not tire.
War gives a man the strength of twenty men,
And hate and love makes new!

RAUTENDELEIN

Here, Heinrich. Drink!

HEINRICH

Yes, give it me, my child. I am athirst
For wine, and light, and love, and joy, and thee!
[*He drinks.*
I drink to thee, thou airy elfin sprite!
And, with this drink, again I thee do wed.
Without thee, my invention would be clogged,
I were a prey to gloom — world-weariness.
My child, I entreat thee, do not fail me now.
Thou art the very pinion of my soul.
Fail not my soul!

RAUTENDELEIN

Ah, do not thou fail me!

HEINRICH

That God forbid! . . . Ho! Music!

RAUTENDELEIN

Hither! Hither!
Come hither, little people! Elves and gnomes!
Come! Help us to make merry! Leave your homes!
Tune all your tiny pipes, and harps, and flutes,
[*Faint elfin music heard without.*
And watch me dance responsive to your lutes!
With glowworms, gleaming emerald, lo, I deck
My waving tresses and my dainty neck.

So jeweled, and adorned with fairy light,
I'll make e'en Freya's necklace seem less bright!

HEINRICH

[*Interrupting.*

Be still! . . . Methought . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

What?

HEINRICH

Didst not hear it then?

RAUTENDELEIN

Hear what?

HEINRICH

Why — nothing.

RAUTENDELEIN

Dearest, what is wrong?

HEINRICH

I know not . . . But, commingling with thy music . . .
Methought I heard . . . a strain . . . a sound . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

What sound?

HEINRICH

A plaint . . . a tone . . . a long, long, buried tone . . .
No matter. It was nothing! Sit thou here!
Give me thy rose-red lips. From this fair cup
I'll drink forgetfulness!

[*They kiss. Long and ecstatic pause. Then* HEINRICH *and* RAUTENDELEIN *move, locked in each other's arms, through the doorway.*

See! Deep and cool and monstrous yawns the gulf
That parts us from the world where mortals dwell.
I am a man. Canst understand me, child? . . .
Yonder I am at home . . . and yet a stranger —
Here I am strange . . . and yet I seem at home.
Canst understand?

RAUTENDELEIN

Yes!

HEINRICH

Yet thou eyest me
So wildly. Why?

RAUTENDELEIN

I'm filled with dread — with horror!

HEINRICH

With dread? Of what?

RAUTENDELEIN

Of what? I cannot tell.

HEINRICH

'Tis nothing. Let us rest.

[HEINRICH *leads* RAUTENDELEIN *towards the doorway in the rocks, right. He stops suddenly, and turns towards the open country.*

Yet may the moon,
That hangs so chalky-white in yonder heavens,
Not shed the still light of her staring eyes
On what's below . . . may she not flood with brightness
The valley whence I rose to these lone heights!
For what lies hid beneath that pall of grey

I dare not gaze on! . . . Hark! Child! Didst
hear nothing?

RAUTENDELEIN

Nothing! And what thou saidst was dark to me!

HEINRICH

What! Dost thou still not hear 't?

RAUTENDELEIN

What should I hear? —
The night wind playing on the heath, I hear —
I hear the cawing of the carrion-kite —
I hear thee, strangely uttering strange, wild words,
In tones that seem as though they were not thine!

HEINRICH

There! There! Below . . . where shines the
wicked moon
Look! Yonder! — Where the light gleams on the
waters!

RAUTENDELEIN

Nothing I see! Nothing!

HEINRICH

With thy gerfalcon eyes
Thou seest naught? Art blind? What drags its
way
Slowly and painfully along . . . There . . . See!

RAUTENDELEIN

Thy fancy cheats thee!

HEINRICH

No! . . . It was no cheat,
As God shall pardon me! . . . Peace! Peace! I
say!

Now it climbs over the great boulder, yonder —
Down by the footpath . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

Heinrich! Do not look!
I'll close the doors and rescue thee by force!

HEINRICH

No! Let me be! . . . I must look down! I will!

RAUTENDELEIN

See — how the fleecy clouds whirl round and round,
As in a giant cauldron, 'mid the rocks!
Weak as thou art, beware! Go not too near!

HEINRICH

I am not weak! . . . 'Twas fancy. Now 'tis gone!

RAUTENDELEIN

That's well! Now be once more our Lord and Master!
Shall wretched visions so undo thy strength?
No! Take thy hammer! Swing it wide and high! . . .

HEINRICH

Dost thou not see them, where they climb and climb? . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

Where?

HEINRICH

There! . . . Now they have reached the rocky path . . .
Clad only in their little shifts they come!

RAUTENDELEIN

Who come?

HEINRICH

Two little lads, with bare, white feet.
They hold an urn between them . . . 'Tis so heavy!
Now one, and now the other, bends his knee . . .
His little, baby knee, to raise it up . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

Oh, help him, mother — help him in his need!

HEINRICH

A halo shines about their tiny heads . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

Some will-o'-the-wisp!

HEINRICH

No! . . . Kneel, and clasp thy hands!
Now . . . see . . . they are coming. Now . . . they are here!

[*He kneels, as the phantom forms of two* CHILDREN, *barefooted and clad only in their nightshifts, ascend from below and advance painfully towards him. Between them they carry a two-handled pitcher.*

FIRST CHILD

[*Faintly.*

Father!

HEINRICH

My child!

FIRST CHILD

Our mother sends thee greeting.

HEINRICH

Thanks, thanks, my dear, dear lad! All's well with her?

First Child

[*Slowly and sadly.*

All's very well! . . .

[*The first faint tones of the sunken bell are heard from the depths.*

Heinrich

What have you brought with you?

Second Child

A pitcher.

Heinrich

Is 't for me?

Second Child

Yes, father dear.

Heinrich

What is there in the pitcher, my dear boy?

Second Child

'Tis something salt! . . .

First Child

. . . And bitter!

Second Child

Mother's tears!

Heinrich

Merciful God!

Rautendelein

What art thou staring at?

Heinrich

At them . . . at them . . .

Rautendelein

At whom?

HEINRICH

Hast thou not eyes?
At them!
[*To the* CHILDREN.
Where is your mother? Speak, oh, speak!

FIRST CHILD

Our mother?

HEINRICH

Yes! Where is she!

SECOND CHILD

With . . . the . . . lilies . . .
The water-lilies . . .
[*The bell tolls loudly.*

HEINRICH

Ah! The bell!

RAUTENDELEIN

What bell?

HEINRICH

The old, old, buried bell! . . . It rings! It tolls!
Who dealt this blow at me? . . . I will not listen!
Help! Help me! . . . Help! . . .

RAUTENDELEIN

Come to your senses, Heinrich!

HEINRICH

It tolls! . . . God help me! . . . Who has dealt this blow?
Hark, how it peals! Hark, how the buried tones
Swell louder, louder, till they sound as thunder,
Flooding the world! . . .
[*Turning to* RAUTENDELEIN.
I hate thee! I abhor thee!

Back! Lest I strike thee! Hence! Thou witch!
Thou trull!
Accursèd spirit! Cursed be thou and I!
Cursed be my work! . . . And all! . . . Here!
Here am I . . .
I come! . . . I come! . . . Now may God pity
me! . . .

[*He makes an effort, rises, stumbles, rises again, and tears himself away.*

[*The* Children *have vanished.*

Rautendelein

Stay! Heinrich! Stay! . . . Woe's me! Lost!
. . . Lost for aye!

END OF THE FOURTH ACT

THE FIFTH ACT

The fir-clad glade seen in the first act.
It is past midnight.
Three Elves *are resting near the well.*

First Elf

The flame glows bright!

Second Elf

The wind of sacrifice —
The red, red wind — blows in the vale!

Third Elf

And lo,
The dark smoke from the pine-clad peak streams down
Into the gulf!

First Elf

And, in the gulf, white clouds
Lie thickly gathered! From the misty sea
The wond'ring herds lift up their drowsy heads,
Lowing, impatient, for their sheltered stalls!

Second Elf

A nightingale within the beechwood sang:
It sang and sobbed into the waning night —
Till, all a-quiver with responsive woe,
I sank upon the dewy grass and wept.

Third Elf

'Tis strange! I lay upon a spider's web.
Between the blades of meadow-grass it hung,

All woven out of marvelous purple threads,
And softer than a royal shift it clung.
I lay, and rested, while the glistening dew
Flashed up at me from the green mead below:
And so, my heavy lids did gently droop,
Until at last I slept. When I awoke,
The light had faded in the distant west:
My bed had turned to grey. But, in the east,
Thick clouds went up, and up, that hid the moon,
While all the rocky ridge was covered o'er
With molten metal, glowing in the night.
And, in the bloody glare that downward streamed,
Methought — 'twas strange — the fields did stir with life,
And whisp'rings, sighs, and voices low I heard
That filled the very air with wretchedness.
Ah, it was pitiful! . . . Then, quick, I hailed
A fire-fly, who his soft, green lamp had trimmed.
But on he flew. And so alone I lay,
Trembling with fear, and lost in wonderment.
Till, winged and gleaming as the dragon-fly,
The dearest, loveliest, of all the elves,
Who from afar his coming had proclaimed,
Rustled and fell into my waiting arms.
And, as we prattled in our cosy bed,
Warm tears were mingled with our kisses sweet,
And then he sighed, and sobbed, and pressed me tight,
Mourning for Balder . . . Balder, who was dead!

First Elf

[*Rising.*

The flame glows bright!

Second Elf

[*Rising.*

'Tis Balder's funeral pyre!

THIRD ELF

[*Who meanwhile has moved slowly to the edge of the wood.*

Balder is dead! . . . I'm chill!

[*She vanishes.*

FIRST ELF

A curse doth fall
Upon the land — as Balder's funeral pall!

[*Fog drifts across the glade. When it clears away the* ELVES *have vanished.*

[*Enter* RAUTENDELEIN, *slowly and wearily descending from the hillside. She drags herself towards the well, halting to rest, sitting and rising again with an effort, on her way. When she speaks, her voice is faint and strange.*

RAUTENDELEIN

Whither? . . . Ah, whither? . . . I sat till late,
While the gnomes ran wild in my hall of state.
They brought me a red, red cup to drain —
And I drank it down, in pain.
For the wine I drank was blood!

. . . . . .

And, when I had drained the last red drop,
My heart in my bosom seemed to stop:
For a hand of iron had gripped the strings —
And still with a burning pain it wrings
The heart that I long to cool!

. . . . . .

Then a crown on my wedding-board they laid —
All of rose-red coral and silver made.
As I set it upon my brow I sighed.

Woe's me! Now the Water-man's won his bride!
And I'll cool my burning heart!

. . . . . .

Three apples fell into my lap last night,
Rose-red, and gold, and white —
Wedding-gifts from my water-sprite.
I ate the white apple, and white I grew:
I ate the gold apple, and rich I grew —
And the red one last I ate!

. . . . . .

Pale, white, and rosy-red,
A maiden sat — and she was dead.
Now, Water-man, unbar thy gate —
I bring thee home thy dead, dead mate.
Deep down in the cold, damp darkness, see —
With the silver fishes I come to thee . . .
Ah, my poor, burnt, aching heart!

[*She descends slowly into the well.*

[The Wood-Sprite *enters from the wood, crosses to the well, and calls down.*

The Wood-Sprite

Hey! Holdrio! Old frog-king! Up with thee!
Hey! Holdrio! Thou web-foot wight bewitched!
Dost thou not hear me, monster? Art asleep?
I say, come up! — and though beside thee lay
Thy fairest water-maid, and plucked thy beard,
I'd still say, leave thy reedy bed and come!
Thou'lt not repent it: for, by cock and pie,
What I've to tell thee is worth many a night
Spent in the arms of thy most lovesick sprite.

The Nickelmann

[*From below.*

Brekekekex!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

Up! Leave thy weedy pool!

THE NICKELMANN

[*From below.*

I have no time. Begone, thou chattering fool!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

What? What? Thou toad-i'-the-hole, thou hast no time
To spare from wallowing in thy mud and slime?
I say, I bring thee news. Didst thou not hear?
What I foretold's come true. I played the seer!
He's left her! . . . Now, an thou wilt but be spry,
Thou'lt haply catch thy wondrous butterfly!
A trifle jaded — ay, and something worn:
But, Lord, what care the Nickelmann and Faun?
Rare sport thou'lt find her, comrade, even now —
Ay, more than thou hadst bargained for, I'll vow.

THE NICKELMANN

[*Rising from the well and blinking slyly.*

Forsooth! . . . He's tired of her, the minx! And so
Thou'dst have me hang upon her skirts? . . . No, no!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

What? . . . Hast thou wearied of this beauty, too?
Why, then — I would her whereabouts I knew!

THE NICKELMANN

Go hunt for her!

THE WOOD-SPRITE

I've sought her, like a dog:
Above — below, through mirk, and mist, and fog.
I've climbed where never mountain-goat had been,

And every marmot far and near I've seen.
Each falcon, glede, and finch, and rat, and snake,
I've asked for news. But none could answer make.
Woodmen I passed — around a fire they slept —
From them I stole a brand, and upward crept:
Till, grasping in my hand the burning wood,
At last before the lonely forge I stood.
And now the smoke of sacrifice ascends!
Loud roar the flames — each rafter cracks and bends!
The power the Master boasted once is fled:
For ever and for aye, 'tis past and dead!

THE NICKELMANN

I know. I know. Thy news is old and stale.
Hast thou disturbed me with this idle tale?
Much more I'd tell thee — ay, who tolled the bell!
And how the clapper swung that rang the knell!
Hadst thou but seen, last night, as I did see,
What ne'er before had been, nor more shall be,
The hand of a dead woman, stark and cold,
Go groping for the bell that tossed and rolled.
And hadst thou heard the bell then make reply,
Peal upon peal send thundering to the sky —
Till, like the lioness that seeks her mate,
It thrilled the Master, even as the Voice of Fate!
I saw the woman — drowned. Her long, brown hair
Floated about her face: 'twas wan with care.
And alway, when her hand the bell had found,
The awful knell did loud, and louder, sound!
I'm old, and used to many a gruesome sight:
Yet horror seized me, and — I took to flight!
Hadst thou but seen, last night, what I have seen,
Thou wouldst not fret about thine elfin quean.

So, let her flit at will, from flower to flower:
I care not, I! Her charm has lost its power.

THE WOOD-SPRITE

'Ods bodikins! I care, though, for the maid.
So — each to his own taste. I want the jade.
And once I hold her panting in these arms,
'Tis little I shall reck of dead alarms!

THE NICKELMANN

Quorax! Brekekekex! Oho! I see.
So that is still the flea that's biting thee?
Well — kill it, then. Go hunt her till thou'rt spent.
Yet, though a-hunting twice ten years thou went,
Thou shouldst not have her. 'Tis for me she sighs!
She has no liking for thy goaty eyes.
A hen-pecked Water-man, alack, I'm tied
By every whim and humor of my bride.
Now fare thee well. Thou'rt free, to come, or go:
But, as for me —'tis time I went below!

[*He disappears in the well.*

THE WOOD-SPRITE

[*Calling down the well.*

So sure as all the stars in heaven do shine —
So sure as these stout shanks and horns are mine —
So sure as fishes swim and birds do fly —
A man-child in thy cradle soon shall lie!
Good-night. Sleep well! And now, be off to bed!
On! On! Through brush and brier! . . . The flea is dead!

[THE WOOD-SPRITE *skips off.*

[*Old* WITTIKIN *issues from the hut and takes down her shutters.*

WITTIKIN

'Twas time I rose. I sniff the morning air.
A pretty hurly there has been to-night.

[*A cock crows.*

Oho! I thought so. Kikereekikee!
No need to give thyself such pains for me —
Thou noisy rogue — as if we did not know
What's coming, ere such cocks as thou did crow.
Thy hen another golden egg has laid?
And soon the sun shall warm the mirky glade?
Ay. Crow thy loudest, gossip! Sing and sing!
The dawn draws near. So strut thy fill and sing.
Another day's at hand. But — here 'tis dark . . .
Will no mad jack-o'-lantern give me a spark? . . .
I'll need more light to do my work, I wis . . .
And, as I live, my carbuncle I miss.

[*She fumbles in her pocket and produces a carbuncle.*

Ah, here it is.

HEINRICH

[*Heard without.*

Rautendelein!

WITTIKIN

Ay, call her!
She'll answer thee, I wager, thou poor brawler!

HEINRICH

[*Without.*

Rautendelein! I come. Dost thou not hear?

WITTIKIN

Thou'lt need to call her louder, man, I fear.

[HEINRICH, *worn and weary, appears on the rocks above the hut. He is pale and in tatters. In his right hand he holds a*

heavy stone, ready to hurl it back into the depths.

HEINRICH

Come, if you dare! Be it priest, or be it barber,
Sexton, or schoolmaster — I care not who!
The first who dares another step to take,
Shall fall and headlong plunge into the gulf!
'Twas ye who drove my wife to death, not I!
Vile rabble, witless wretches, beggars, rogues —
Who weeks together mumble idle prayers
For a lost penny! Yet, so base are ye,
That, where ye can, God's everlasting love
Ye cheat of ducats! . . . Liars! Hypocrites!
Like rocks ye are heaped about your nether-land,
Ringing it round, as with a dam of stone,
Lest haply God's own waters, rushing in,
Should flood your arid Hell with Paradise.
When shall the great destroyer wreck your dam?
I am not he . . . Alas! I am not the man!

[*He drops the stone and begins to ascend.*

WITTIKIN

That way is barred. So halt! And climb no more.

HEINRICH

Woman, what burns up yonder?

WITTIKIN

Nay, I know not.
Some man there was, I've heard, who built a thing,
Half church, half royal castle. Now — he's gone!
And, since he's left it, up it goes in flame.

[HEINRICH *makes a feeble effort to press upward.*

Did I not tell thee, man, the road was barred?

He who would pass that way had need o' wings.
And thy wings have been broken.

HEINRICH

Ah, broken or no,
I tell thee, woman, I must reach the peak!
What flames up yonder is my work — all mine!
Dost understand me? . . . I am he who built it.
And all I was, and all I grew to be,
Was spent on it . . . I can . . . I can . . . no more!

[*Pause.*]

WITTIKIN

Halt here a while. The roads are still pitch-dark.
There is a bench. Sit down and rest.

HEINRICH

I? . . . Rest? . . .
Though thou shouldst bid me sleep on silk and down,
That heap of ruins still would draw me on.
The kiss my mother — long she's joined the dust —
Did press years since upon my fevered brow,
Would bring no blessing to me now, no peace:
'Twould sting me like a wasp.

WITTIKIN

Ay, so it would!
Wait here a bit, man. I will bring thee wine.
I've still a sup or two.

HEINRICH

I must not wait.
Water! I thirst! I thirst!

WITTIKIN

Go, draw, and drink!

[HEINRICH *moves to the well, draws, sits*

on the edge of the well, and drinks. A faint, sweet voice is heard from below, singing mournfully.

THE VOICE

[*From below.*

Heinrich, my sweetheart, I loved thee true.
Now thou art come to my well to woo.
Wilt thou not go?
Love is all woe —
Adieu! Adieu!

HEINRICH

Woman, what voice was that? Speak — answer me!
What called and sang to me in such sad tones?
It murmured, "Heinrich!" . . . from the depths it came . . .
And then it softly sighed, "Adieu! Adieu!"
Who art thou, woman? And what place is this?
Am I awaking from some dream? . . . These rocks,
Thy hut, thyself, I seem to know ye all!
Yet all are strange. Can that which me befell
Have no more substance than a peal that sounds,
And, having sounded, dies away in silence?
Woman, who art thou?

WITTIKIN

I? . . . And who art thou?

HEINRICH

Dost ask me that? . . . Yes! Who am I? God wot!
How often have I prayed to Heaven to tell me! . . .
Who am I, God! . . . But Heaven itself is mute.
Yet this I do know: that, whatsoe'er I be,

Hero or weakling, demi-god or beast —
I am the outcast child of the bright Sun —
That longs for home: all helpless now, and maimed,
A bundle of sorrow, weeping for the Light
That stretches out its radiant arms in vain,
And yearns for me! . . . What dost thou there?

WITTIKIN

Thou'lt learn that soon enough.

HEINRICH

[*Rising.*
Nay, I'll begone!
Now, with thy bloody lamplight, show me a way
Will lead me onward, upward, to the heights!
Once I am there, where erst I Master stood.
Lonely I'll live — thenceforth a hermit be —
Who neither rules, nor serves.

WITTIKIN

I doubt it much!
What thou would'st seek up yonder is not that.

HEINRICH

How canst thou know?

WITTIKIN

We know what we do know.
They'd almost run thee down, my friend? . . .
Ay, ay!
When life shines bright, like wolves ye men do act,
Rend it and torture it. But, when death comes,
No bolder are ye than a flock of sheep,
That tremble at the wolf. Ay, ay, 'tis true!
The herds that lead ye are but sorry carles
Who with the hounds do hunt and loudly yelp:
They do not set their hounds to hunt the wolf:

Nay, nay: their sheep they drive into its jaws! . . .
Thou'rt not much better than the other herds.
Thy bright life thou hast torn and spurned away.
And when death fronted thee, thou wast not bold.

HEINRICH

Ah, woman, list! . . . I know not how it came
That I did spurn and kill my clear bright life:
And, being a Master, did my task forsake,
Like a mere 'prentice, quaking at the sound
Of my own handiwork, the bell which I
Had blessed with speech. And yet 'tis true! Its voice
Rang out so loud from its great iron throat,
Waking the echoes of the topmost peaks,
That, as the threatening peal did rise and swell,
It shook my soul! . . . Yet I was still the Master!
Ere it had shattered me who moulded it,
With this same hand, that gave it form and life,
I should have crushed and ground it into atoms.

WITTIKIN

What's past, is past: what's done, is done, for aye.
Thou'lt never win up to thy heights, I trow.
This much I'll grant: thou wast a sturdy shoot,
And mighty — yet too weak. Though thou wast called,
Thou'st not been chosen! . . . Come. Sit down beside me.

HEINRICH

Woman! Farewell!

WITTIKIN

Come here, and sit thee down.
Strong — yet not strong enow!

Who lives, shall life pursue. But be thou sure,
Up yonder thou shalt find it nevermore.

HEINRICH

Then let me perish here, where now I stand!

WITTIKIN

Ay, so thou shalt. He who has flown so high,
Into the very Light, as thou hast flown,
Must perish, if he once fall back to Earth!

HEINRICH

I know it. I have reached my journey's end.
So be it.

WITTIKIN

Yes! Thou hast reached the end!

HEINRICH

Then tell me —
Thou who dost seem to me so strangely wise —
Am I to die and never more set eyes
On what, with bleeding feet, I still must seek?
Thou dost not answer me? . . . Must I go hence —
Leave my deep night, and pass to deepest darkness —
Missing the afterglow of that lost light?
Shall I not see her once . . . ?

WITTIKIN

Whom wouldst thou see?

HEINRICH

I would see her. Whom else? . . . Dost not know that?

WITTIKIN

Thou hast one wish! . . . It is thy last! . . . So — wish.

HEINRICH

[*Quickly.*

I have wished!

WITTIKIN

Then thou shalt see her once again.

HEINRICH

[*Rising and ecstatically.*

Ah, mother! . . . Why I name thee thus, I know not . . .
Art thou so mighty? . . . Canst thou do so much? . . .
Once I was ready for the end, as now:
Half hoping, as each feeble breath I drew,
That it might be the last. But then she came —
And healing, like the breeze in early Spring,
Rushed through my sickly frame: and I grew well . . .
All of a sudden, now I feel so light,
That I could soar up to the heights again.

WITTIKIN

Too late!

[HEINRICH *recoils in terror.*

Thy heavy burdens weigh thee down:
Thy dead ones are too mighty for thee. See!
I place three goblets on the table. So.
The first I fill with white wine. In the next,
Red wine I pour: the last I fill with yellow.
Now, shouldst thou drain the first, thy vanished power
Shall be restored to thee. Shouldst drink the second,
Once more thou shalt behold the spirit bright
Whom thou hast lost. But an thou dost drink both,
Thou must drain down the last.

[*She turns to enter the hut. On the threshold she halts and utters the next words with solemn emphasis.*

I say thou must!

[*She goes into the hut.*

[Heinrich *has listened to the preceding speech like a man dazed. As* Old Wittikin *leaves him, he rouses himself and sinks on a bench.*

Heinrich

Too late! . . . She said, "Too late!" . . . Now all is done!
O heart, that knowest all, as ne'er before:
Why dost thou question? . . . Messenger of Fate!
Thy fiat, as the axe, doth sharply fall,
Cutting the strand of life! . . . It is the end!
What's left is respite! . . . But I'll profit by 't.
Chill blows the wind from the abyss. The day
That yonder gleam so faintly doth forerun,
Piercing the sullen clouds with pale white shafts,
I shall not see. So many days I have lived:
Yet this one day I shall not live to see!

[*He raises the first goblet.*

Come then, thou goblet, ere the horror come!
A dark drop glistens at the bottom. One!
A last one . . . Why, thou crone, hadst thou no more?
So be it! [*He drinks.*] And now to thee, thou second cup!

[*He raises the second goblet.*

It was for thee that I did drain the first.
And, wert thou missing, thou delicious draught,
Whose fragrance tempts to madness, the carouse
Whereunto God has bid us in this world

Were all too poor, meseems — unworthy quite,
Of thee, who dost the festal board so honour.
Now I do thank thee — thus!

[*He drinks.*

The drink is good.

[*A murmur as of æolian harps floats on the air while he drinks.*

[Rautendelein *rises slowly from the well. She looks weary and sad. She sits on the edge of the well, combing her long flowing locks. Moonlight.* Rautendelein *is pale. She sings into vacancy. Her voice is faint.*

Rautendelein

All, all alone, in the pale moon-shine,
I comb my golden hair,
Fair, fairest Rautendelein!
The mists are rising, the birds take flight,
The fires burn low in the weary night . . .

The Nickelmann

[*From below.*

Rautendelein!

Rautendelein

I'm coming!

The Nickelmann

[*From below.*

Come at once!

Rautendelein

Woe, woe is me!
So tight I am clad,
A maid o' the well, bewitched and so sad!

THE NICKELMANN

[*From below.*

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN

I'm coming!

THE NICKELMANN

[*From below.*

Come thou now!

RAUTENDELEIN

I comb my hair in the moonlight clear,
And think of the sweetheart who loved me dear.
The blue-bells all are ringing.
Ring they of joy? Ring they of pain?
Blessing and bane —
Answers the song they are singing!
Now down I go, to my weedy well —
No more I may wait:
I must join my mate —
Farewell! Farewell!

[*She prepares to descend.*

Who calls so softly?

HEINRICH

I.

RAUTENDELEIN

Who'rt thou?

HEINRICH

Why — I.
Do but come nearer — ah, why wouldst thou fly?

RAUTENDELEIN

I dare not come! . . . I know thee not. Away!
For him who speaks to me, I am doomed to slay.

HEINRICH

Why torture me? Come. Lay thy hand in mine,
And thou shalt know me.

RAUTENDELEIN

I have never known thee.

HEINRICH

Thou know'st me not?

RAUTENDELEIN

No!

HEINRICH

Thou hast never seen me?

RAUTENDELEIN

I cannot tell.

HEINRICH

Then may God cast me off!
I never kissed thee till thy lips complained?

RAUTENDELEIN

Never.

HEINRICH

Thou'st never pressed thy lips to mine?

THE NICKELMANN

[*From below.*

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN

I'm coming!

THE NICKELMANN

Come. I wait.

HEINRICH

Who called to thee?

RAUTENDELEIN

'Twas the Water-man — my mate!

HEINRICH

Thou seest my agony — the pain and strife
That rend my soul, and eat away my life!
Ah, torture me no longer. Set me free!

RAUTENDELEIN

Then, as thou wilt. But how?

HEINRICH

Come close to me!

RAUTENDELEIN

I cannot come.

HEINRICH

Thou canst not?

RAUTENDELEIN

No. I am bound.

HEINRICH

By what?

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Retreating.*

I must begone to join the round,
A merry dance — and though my foot be sore,
Soon, as I dancing go, it burns no more.
Farewell! Farewell!

HEINRICH

Where art thou? Stay, ah stay!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Disappearing behind the well.*

Lost, lost, for ever!

HEINRICH

The goblet — quick, I say!
There . . . there . . . the goblet! . . . Magda?
Thou? . . . So pale! . . .
Give me the cup. Who brings it, I will hail
My truest friend.

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Reappearing.*

I bring it.

HEINRICH

Be thou blessed.

RAUTENDELEIN

Yes. I will do it. Leave the dead to rest!
[*She gives* HEINRICH *the goblet.*

HEINRICH

I feel thee near me, thou dear heart of mine!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Retreating.*

Farewell! Farewell! I never can be thine!
Once I was thy true love — in May, in May —
Now all is past, for aye! . . .

HEINRICH

For aye!

RAUTENDELEIN

For aye!
Who sang thee soft to sleep with lullabies?
Who woke thee with enchanting melodies?

HEINRICH

Who, who — but thou?

RAUTENDELEIN

Who am I?

HEINRICH

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN

Who poured herself into thy veins, as wine?
Whom didst thou drive into the well to pine?

HEINRICH

Thee, surely thee!

RAUTENDELEIN

Who am I?

HEINRICH

Rautendelein!

RAUTENDELEIN

Farewell! Farewell!

[*He drinks.*

HEINRICH

Nay: lead me gently down.
Now comes the night — the night that all would flee.

[RAUTENDELEIN *hastens to him, and clasps him about the knees.*

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Exultingly.*

The Sun is coming!

HEINRICH

The Sun!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Half sobbing, half rejoicing.*
Ah, Heinrich!

HEINRICH

Thanks!

RAUTENDELEIN

[*Embracing* HEINRICH, *she presses her lips to his, and then gently lays him down as he dies.*

Heinrich!

HEINRICH

[*Ecstatically.*

I hear them! 'Tis the Sun-bells' song!
The Sun . . . the Sun . . . draws near! . . .
The Night is . . . long!

[*Dawn breaks. He dies.*

HENRY OF AUË

A GERMAN LEGEND

Dedicated to the memory of my brother
Georg Hauptmann

Henry of Auë
Hartmann of Auë
Gottfried
Brigitta
Ottegebe
Father Benedict
Ottacker
Knights and Men at Arms

THE FIRST ACT

The garden beside GOTTFRIED'S *house. To the left the gable of the house itself and the entrance door are visible. Steps lead up to the door. Not far therefrom stands an ancient elm. Beneath it a table of stone and a bench of green sward. From here one has a vision of far green plateaus. In the foreground autumnal fields; on the horizon wooded hills. Isolated groups of fir-trees are scattered about the landscape.*

THE FIRST SCENE

GOTTFRIED *is busy sweeping dead leaves from the table of stone.* OTTACKER *appears, a man at arms in armour, about forty years old. Accoutred for riding he slinks through the garden, careful to make no sound with his armour and spurs. He starts as he becomes aware of* GOTTFRIED; *his pale, black-bearded face changes colour.*

GOTTFRIED

Praised be our Saviour Christ!

OTTACKER

Forevermore!

GOTTFRIED

Whither away so early in the dawn?

OTTACKER

To fly a hawk, follow the deer, to ride!

GOTTFRIED

Will not our master want thee?

OTTACKER

[*Scratching his head in embarrassment.*
Scarcely! Ay,
Perhaps! A message, Gottfried! Do but think . . .
That is to say, if all things by God's will
Turn unto good, or even prove of ill,
I shall return — yet . . .

GOTTFRIED

All thy words are dark:
Perchance some evil has befallen them
Thou holdest dear, at home?

OTTACKER

Be still! 'Tis true!
Only be silent. I must away. My mother —
Also my sister! Delicate matters — these!
With Satan I would fight but for this thing!
And did they live whom I in heathenesse
Felled to the earth, they'd prove my valour true!

GOTTFRIED

What is it? Art thou sick?

OTTACKER

Nay! And may God
Keep us from fell diseases, evil flux
And pestilence, our sinful heritage.
Yet am I firm and hale and pure in blood,
And hale and firm I would remain henceforth.

The world is evil, full of demons, Christ
Is my protection. Absolution I
Bought with the blood of many a Saracen,
Gave booty to the priests, wear near my heart
A splinter of the cross from Holy Land.
A fever shakes me; I must away; I dreamed
A dream of evil presage! All who are
Of mortal birth, guard well their life and limb!
[*Exit* Ottacker.

Gottfried

[*Gazing after him.*
By heaven, he tears the pied horse from the stall —
Clatters into the saddle and — is gone.

THE SECOND SCENE

From the house comes Brigitta *followed by* Ottegebe. Brigitta *is a dignified matron, not very rustic in her aspect;* Ottegebe *is a pallid child on the threshold of maidenhood. Her eyes are large and dark; her hair of a pale yellow intermixed with reddish and golden strands. Mother and daughter carry table linen and dishes.*

Brigitta

Where shall I spread the board for our good lord?
Gottfried! O Gottfried!

Gottfried

[*Awakening from his consternation.*
What is it? Didst thou call?

Brigitta

Ay, surely; for the broth is ready now,
The fish is boiled, the cream is beaten. Where
Thinkest thou I may spread the board for him?

GOTTFRIED

[*Pointing to the table of stone.*

Come hither! In old days this place was still
His favourite. Was it not here he sat, my child?

OTTEGEBE

[*Nodding with eagerness.*

Ay, father! And fresh honey, father, too . . .
Surely thou saidest thou wouldst cut the combs?

GOTTFRIED

Who bound that riband yonder in thine hair?

OTTEGEBE

The riband?

GOTTFRIED

Ay, the crimson riband, child!

OTTEGEBE

[*Blushes hotly in her embarrassment.*

Oh where?

GOTTFRIED

In thine own braids!

[OTTEGEBE *remains silent.*

BRIGITTA

Did not I say
That father would reprove thee, seeing it.

[OTTEGEBE *grows pale, fights down her tears, tears the riband from her hair, throws it on the ground and runs away.*

THE THIRD SCENE

BRIGITTA

'Twas but in honour of our gracious lord.
Now she is shamed,

GOTTFRIED

Look to the child, Brigitta,
Lest, overbold, she anger our good lord.
He is no boy to-day as in those years
When she was still in leading-strings and he
In boyish fashion rallied her and played.

BRIGITTA

I think he is not merry in his mood.

GOTTFRIED

I know not. But who saw him yestermorn
Among his huntsmen in the meadow there,
Laughing of eye, point to our mossy stead
With his sword's hilt and then depart from them
With joyous greeting — he might think, indeed,
That never yet had sorrow's shadow touched
His proud, magnificent youth. To-day I saw
Another man, one whom I did not know.

BRIGITTA

Is it not strange that now, upon this tide —
When, as men say, he was to wed, he comes
Hither unto our half-forgotten dale?

GOTTFRIED

The great are strange and variable of mood.
What is it to us?

BRIGITTA

Ay. But his man at arms
Drinking too freely yesternight did jest
Among our servants, with dark words and strange,
Of the Mosaic law which bids men wash
The walls of houses wherein ill has dwelt,
Of poison and of leprosy to cleanse them.

GOTTFRIED

Who says so?

BRIGITTA

Ottegebe, our own child.

GOTTFRIED

Hear me, Brigitta, and shut fast thine ears
To evil rumours. For our lord stands high
In glory and favour, clings to the emperor,
And is not loved of him who keeps the keys
Of Peter. The begging monks cast wide
Their lies among the people; none so gross
But finds believers in the vulgar herd.

BRIGITTA

Does he not come along the alder path?

GOTTFRIED

'Tis he!

BRIGITTA

And he goes bowed, not straight, as once.

GOTTFRIED

Stare not so boldly, it will vex our lord.

BRIGITTA

Look how he gazes straight into the dawn!

GOTTFRIED

'Tis he. I am going now, and thou, Brigitta,
Bid him come to the board with courtesy
But briefly. Take thy leave then and depart.

BRIGITTA

Trouble thyself not, father.

THE FOURTH SCENE

HENRY OF AUË *enters, slowly and in thought.*

His figure is slender and knightly . . . graceful locks, a pointed beard of reddish hue, well cared for . . . great, blue, restless eyes in his somewhat pallid face.

BRIGITTA

God give thee greeting.

HENRY

And to thee, good mother.

BRIGITTA

There's the board.
What is on it is most poor, and yet the best
That a world-distant farmstead can afford.

HENRY

I thought that yesterday, at evening, late,
I heard the mule-bells tinkle in the court?

BRIGITTA

Nay, lord.

HENRY

Nay? Not toward the midnight hour?
[BRIGITTA *shakes her head.*

HENRY

'Tis pity, for I much desired my books.

BRIGITTA

Hast thou some farther wish?

HENRY

Ay . . . many, many.

BRIGITTA

One that my humble power can satisfy?

HENRY

That thou canst satisfy, Brigitta? No!
Perhaps! The time may come — not now — perhaps!
'Tis well; I thank thee.

BRIGITTA

Blessings on thy meal.
[*Exit.*

THE FIFTH SCENE

HENRY

[*Alone, lays the palm of his hand against the cool trunk of the elm, looks up, and says to himself with repressed emotion:*
Still in full foliage stands the elm, aloft
And moveless, as though cast of bronze, it lifts
Its top in the clear morning's chilly air.
The silver breath of the approaching frost
Will strip it bare, perhaps to-morrow morn.
It does not move. All that I see about
Rests in deep resignation; only not man,
Only not I.— O Peace, return to me!
Thou art so near, on quiet meadow lands
Thou restest . . . the dark foliage of the firs —
The old Black Forest fir-trees of my childhood —
Breathe thee upon my head. Among these hills
Of my dear homeland art thou, too, at home:
Then be to me a brother and a friend.

THE SIXTH SCENE

GOTTFRIED

[*Appears in the door of the house.*
God give thee greeting, lord.

HENRY

Good morning, father.

GOTTFRIED

I never saw a better morning yet
In all my life, my dearest lord, than this.
For at my first step in the open I
Behold my noble master, my dear guest.
But look: thou shamest us all and me in chief!
One of the seven sleepers I appear
Beside thee and a most uncivil host.

HENRY

[*Begins his meal.*

Friend, trouble not thyself. Once I slept well
Amid the wildest tumult of a camp,
At many a prince's court where, day and night,
The doors groaned on their hinges. I, amid
The tramp of horses, cries of men at arms,
Lay like a stone and slept. Here all is still;
And in that stillness does my soul grow loud;
And while, without, on meadow land and moor
The moon pours out her pallid light and naught
Wakes with me but some cricket of the field,
Rises a roaring clamour in my head
Of roundelay and dance and knightly games,
Battle cries, alien speech and whispering voices,
That I can silence not.

GOTTFRIED

Unquiet then
Thy rest through the long night?

HENRY

Sleep is a refuge.
Woe to the refugeless! Is it not so?

GOTTFRIED

Ay, gracious lord.

HENRY

Indeed, the lash of custom
Drives me, for many years, from my light rest
Before the dawn, oft at the midnight hour.
And shouldst thou mark this, then I beg of thee,
That freedom grant me and be not astonished.

GOTTFRIED

Thine is the house, my lord, wherein we dwell,
And thine the earth whereon it has been built.
'Tis thine but to command, not ours to grant.
Awake us if it pleases thee to watch.

HENRY

Sleep on in peace! Sleep on! Thou hast earned thy rest
Through the long labour of the difficult day.
What can thy watch avail me? But my thanks
Are thine, my gratitude for what this hour
I recognise again and long ago,
Even in my boyhood, knew — thy faithful heart.
But not to rob that heart am I come here,
Or of its golden treasure rifle it;
But praying friend, the grace of thee to be
Alone, with my own soul, beside thy hearth.

GOTTFRIED

[*After a silence.*

Wilt thou not grant me leave to go?

HENRY

Sit down.
Falsely thou read'st my meaning. Come! It heals
My heart to see thy white and reverend head;
After so many years to hear again

Thy dear paternal voice. Let it not vex thee
If I seem alien on this frugal earth
Tilled by thine arm. I am Italianate
Doubtless and strange, yet 'tis a German hand
That answers to the pressure of thine own.

GOTTFRIED

[*Kneeling before* HENRY, *grasps the proffered hand with both of his and is about to kiss it.* HENRY *withdraws his hand quickly.*

Thou, thou Italianate? Forbid it, Christ!
For if thou be not master of the use
Of German knightliness, and mirror clear
Of virtue, where, in German lands, are found
Gentleness, high-souled courage, and tried faith?
German I call thee as this hemlock, sprung
Purely of German blood and purely kept.
The blue eyes, starlike, of Rome's warder, shine
No brighter and his crown's great jewel would stand
Proudly above the gold gleam of thy head
As above his.

HENRY

[*Sombre.*

Hm. It may be, indeed.
The diamond retains its brightness still,
Even though it be poor Lazarus who wears
The buckle at his helm wherein it glows.

[*Swiftly changing the subject.*

We have rendered Cæsar what to him belongs.
Enough! Enough! Rest here and speak to me
Of other things. What chatter Chantecleer
Crows to his hens betwixt thy barn and stalls
Is now a fairer feast unto mine ears

Than even Vogelweide's royal song.
How many horses hast thou? How many kine?
Does the poor land repay thy sweat and toil?
How was the harvest — fruitage, corn and wine?
This is the news, behold, for which I long.
Speak not to me of Rome's high warder, not
Of Turk or Christian, Ghibelline or Guelf!

GOTTFRIED

My converse is uncourtly to thine ears;
I mark it well. But, my dear lord, consider,
If so it vex thee, that in my daily toil
I cannot practise courtly speech and grace.

HENRY

The highest field upon the upland, there
Where the tilled earth does meet the forest-side,
Is it not a field of pease?

GOTTFRIED

Ay, gracious lord.

HENRY

Yesternight when together, my steed and I
Carefully we descended by that way,
I heard a chorus of soft children's voices
Singing *Ave Maria,* and at once
I saw, not far away, at the path's edge
A small glow flicker by the parapet.
I left my horse behind and stealthily
Came nearer; and soon I became aware
Of boys and girls moving about the fire
Shadowlike, ghostlike, in mysterious wise.
God greet ye, little wizards, then I said,
What do ye brew and bake here in the dark?
Scarce spoken — and the little flock had fled.
Only one maiden stood beside the fire,

Erect and trembling, looked up and was still.
Didst thou too sing? I questioned. She was dumb.

GOTTFRIED

Forgive the child, dear lord, for she was ours.
'Twas Ottegebe, my daughter. She has made
Sleepless her mother's nights and mine by cause
Of the exceeding strangeness of her ways.

HENRY

Her ways are strange exceeding; it is true.

GOTTFRIED

Thou knewest her in olden days and oft
Wouldst lift her high beside thee on thy steed.
Yet even in those far days she was shyer than
A quail that nests her in the wheat field; thou
Couldst charm her forth and always foundst her tame.

HENRY

Ah, in those days! Those days! I mind it well,
When from some happy mountain hunt I came
At evensong, weary but gay at heart,
I saw her first of all and called her then
In old time merry mood: My little spouse!
Ah, those old days! Those days! High was my heart,
And mad delight of life danced in my head.
I know; I know! Behold, I am so far,
So far removed from that old, golden Spring,
That Ottegebe even, my little spouse,
When that I saw her, seemed a stranger to me,
As though Diana, my good brach, had never
Tumultuously licked her face and hands;
As though I had never stroked her childish hair,

Nor ever, for her pastime, on the horn
I bore beside me, played her huntsman's ditties,
As oftentimes I did.

THE SEVENTH SCENE

[Ottegebe *bringing honey-combs on a little dish.*

Gottfried

She is coming now.

Henry

What doest thou bring?

Ottegebe

[*Breathless.*
Fresh honey in the comb.

Henry

Behold, thou speakest now and art not dumb.
I am glad at that and, knowing it, thou must
Sit down on yonder bench, my child, and give
Me answer, for I mean to question thee.
Why dost thou tremble? Have no fear at all.
Oh, I am mild, mild! Thou wouldst scarce believe,
How harmless! Tell me: Art thou well?

Ottegebe

[*In the extremity of bashfulness.*
Ay, well.

Henry

What? Always well?

Ottegebe

[*Almost swooning with timidity.*
Ay, lord.

HENRY

All's well with thee!
And the imperial Frederic, golden-crowned,
Knows naught but strife, eternal lack and toil.
Why thou art the richer of the two, my child,
Not to name my estate! And does the time
Seem never in these uplands long to thee?

[OTTEGEBE *shakes her head.*

HENRY

If idle fancies come, how dost thou chase them?

OTTEGEBE

[*Is silent at first and aquiver with the hardness of the confession.*

I pray.

HENRY

Prayer is a goodly thing, in truth.
And who, among the saints, is dearest to thee?

OTTEGEBE

The Virgin, for she healed me of my ill.

HENRY

She healed thee? Ah, and wounds she dealt to me!
Trust thou my words: She can deal wounds as well!

OTTEGEBE

Nay, lord.

HENRY

What? Nay? Is that thy thought? Ah, if
Thou canst instruct me, teach me happier truth —
Delay not — teach me and instruct me now?

[OTTEGEBE *shakes her head vehemently.*

GOTTFRIED

Indulge her, my dear lord, and think that she
But lately from a bed of sickness rose.

HENRY

Why hidest thou thy right hand from our sight?

GOTTFRIED

What, lord?

HENRY

Why dost thou hide it?

GOTTFRIED

Let us see!

OTTEGEBE

Nay, father.

GOTTFRIED

But thou art a stubborn maid!
Our lord commands it; show him as he bids!

BRIGITTA

[*Within.*

Gottfried!

OTTEGEBE

My mother calls!

[*She is about to go.*

BRIGITTA

[*Within.*

Gottfried!

GOTTFRIED

Forgive . . . !

HENRY

Thou mayst take thy leave.

[GOTTFRIED *exit.*

THE EIGHTH SCENE

HENRY

But tell me quickly now:
Dost thou yet know me?

[OTTEGEBE *nods vehemently.*

HENRY

Who am I?

OTTEGEBE

Our master.

HENRY

The otter has its hole, its nest the bird,
The fox his cave, and only I, the man,
Whom thou accountest master is devoid
Of refuge! Look: The earth beneath his feet
Wherever he may set his step does burn
With flame of hell? Why art thou laughing?

OTTEGEBE

[*Who has broken out into a short, hysterical laugh, masters herself and, pale again, looks upon him with timid and fearful eyes.*

I?

HENRY

How am I called?

OTTEGEBE

[*Throbbing.*

Henry.

HENRY

Henry. What more?

OTTEGEBE

Thou art called Henry, Count of Auë, sir.

HENRY

God knows, 'tis true, indeed. And for what space
Child, hast thou known me?

OTTEGEBE

For what space?

HENRY

What space!

OTTEGEBE

For two years.

HENRY

Is it possible? Ah, no!
I think thou errest, for by my knightly word,
'Tis nine years! Since, I have been here no more.

OTTEGEBE

[*In extreme embarrassment.*
I was still small!

HENRY

True, true; thou wert still small!
Thy childhood does not count the fleeting years
So closely.— Two years ago — ah, child —
This poor, poor guest who eats a meagre crust
Of peasant's bread to ease his hunger, lay
In marble halls where lyric fountains plashed
And golden fishes in the basins swam;
And if his eye ecstatic roved afar
'Twas where in delicate clouds the incense o'er
The magic gardens of Azzahra rose.
O child, thou hast not seen in strangest dreams
A Paradise like that, where heavy and sweet
Splendour and ecstasy oppress us . . . where
The bamboo quivers in the hidden grove,
Darkened and roofed by immemorial heights
Of cedar, and the azalea bushes spread

Their pillows of pure bloom. The azure sea
Seems as of blossoms; it foams on marble steps,
And rocks the gondolas aglow with gold,
Purple and precious stones. And then thou hearest
Music. The slave-girl sings: O sombre bloom
And sad. Into the cypress-shaded well
She dips the flashing silver of her pail . . .
Strange words from alien ardours of the soul
Murmur about thee. Thou drinkest them in with all
The swooning fragrance which the gentle wind
Brings from the west to lull thee into sleep.—
Enough of that! No more! For I am here,
And not in Granada, not in Palermo.
And so I pray thee, tell me all thou knowest,
After the years that seem to thee so brief,
Of me and of our olden friendship here.

OTTEGEBE

[*In consternation.*

Nothing, lord, nothing!

HENRY

Never I'll believe it!
Nothing? That's little for those wise, clear eyes.
I ask thee on thy conscience, little maid —
O little Ottegebe, more saint than maid —
With that clear aureole of silken flax:
How did I call thee in those dear, far days?
How? Speak! How did I call thee when to me
More than to thine own mother thou didst cling?
How was I wont to call thee? Tell me? Tell!

OTTEGEBE

[*Turns away from him in excessive embarrassment, trembles, bites the hem of her apron, breaks out into laughter which*

frightens herself and which she restrains at once. She bends half over and only after renewed gestures of encouragement, whispers softly and haltingly.

My little spouse!

HENRY

Right so! My little spouse!
Soon will some honest country lad appear
And call thee so in truth, as I in jest.

[OTTEGEBE *shocked, turns very pale and runs.*

HENRY

Whither away?

OTTEGEBE

[*Stops trembling.*
I thought my father called.

HENRY

Stay, stay and rest, unless it be that I
Have forfeited thy favour of old days.
Is it so perchance? I should be sad indeed.

[OTTEGEBE *exit.*

THE NINTH SCENE

[GOTTFRIED *returns.*

GOTTFRIED

[*Sighing.*
The child is stranger than our wisdom grasps.
Her mother met her cutting honey-combs
Within the hives; her arms and breast and hands
Stung by the angry bees. And this she did
To gain the honey for thy board which I
Despite her prayer on yestereve forgot.

HENRY

[*Astonished, confounded and yet amused.*
To hoard a little sweetness for my sake
She bears those wounds upon her lithe, young form?

[*He laughs.*
Go, Gottfried, call my servant hither then.
Let Ottacker bring me from my saddle-bag
The golden chain bearing a golden moon
That I may give it to my little spouse!
Go, go! Why dost thou stay?

GOTTFRIED

[*Hesitating.*
The man is gone.

HENRY

What? Who is gone?

GOTTFRIED

Ottacker, thine esquire.

HENRY

What does it mean? Gone? Who has sent him hence?

GOTTFRIED

I thought, dear lord, that thou wouldst know of it!

HENRY

[*Having collected himself, from the depth of his heart.*
I should have known it, but I knew it not.
[*He arises, pale, and walks slowly to and from, mastering a profound emotion.*
Patience! And have thou patience with me too.
Hear me: Why I returned to thee, O friend,
Into thy green and fragrant hemlock — grave . . .

Some day thou too must learn, but not to-day.
Shelter me in the meanwhile for God's sake
As though I were, not Henry, lord and count,
But a poor pilgrim who for refuge prays,
For refuge and for peace!

GOTTFRIED

My gracious lord . . .

HENRY

Nay, in that guise I had not come again!
Do ever faithful servants leave their lord?
I cannot slay him for it, not reprove!
Nay, what thou grantest me must be free grace.
I come not to exact or tithe or tax:
An alms I ask, O Gottfried, the free gift
Of thy compassion!

GOTTFRIED

Mine ear deceives me, lord!
The mighty Henry, Count of Auë, begs
A humble peasant and retainer poor
For grace, for favour, for compassion!

HENRY

The mighty Henry, lord of lands, has grown
Powerless and poor. He knows himself no more.
Let this suffice thee, Gottfried, for a space.
For days will come . . . ah, many days and hours,
Long hours, perchance, and longer, wearier days,
Wherein I'll sing to thee this litany
Endless, accursed. And it will vex thee sore,
And it will answer to satiety
All that thy words and looks demand. I'll stay
Beside thee here for weeks, for months, for years!
And if I go some day . . . Silence of that!
Naught is so dark but time will make it clear.

Content thyself! Patience! A peaceless heart
Must struggle still for peace. Give me what lies
Upon thy forehead, honest friend; oh give
Of the rich treasure of thy peace to me,
Whereafter my poor soul is more athirst
Than for the gold of Saladin, the king.

[*Slowly he leaves the scene.*

[Gottfried *looks after* Henry, *utterly astonished and deeply moved.*

[Brigitta *enters.*

Brigitta

Our master went?

Gottfried

Are his words clear to thee?

Brigitta

Not his, nor yet our child's. For prone she lies,
And weeps and vows: "I must redeem him . . . I!"

Gottfried

From what?

Brigitta

She says: "Ask Father Benedict!"

THE SECOND ACT

The kitchen in the house of the farmer GOTTFRIED. *A great sooty hearth with flue in the middle. Cleanly kitchen utensils of tin and clay along the walls, as well as several pieces of armour and swords. In one corner a crucifix with a rude lamp before it. A long, rough servant's table with benches. To the right, not far from the hearth, an old leathern armchair with a deer skin spread before it. Above the hearth and on the wall to the left, antlers, the horns of a bison and cross-bows. It is winter.*

THE FIRST SCENE

BRIGITTA, *her sleeves rolled up to her elbows, fills the little begging bag of* BROTHER BENEDICT *with bread and cheese.* BROTHER BENEDICT *is not yet fifty years old, but his energetic, weather-beaten face is venerable and framed by snow white hair. His cowl is badly worn.*

BENEDICT

I know not! Ask me not. His father was
A true knight Templar. When my father died,
Honoured and rich, albeit of peasant blood,
With his last breath he bade me to be true
To the Eternal King, and equally
To the dear, temporal master, by whose aid
His well-being still waxed from year to year,

Who shared his cup and who unto his grave
Went with bare head and grieved, in pilgrim guise.

BRIGITTA

Then tell me: Is he excommunicate?

BENEDICT

Naught will I tell thee — naught! Has he not bent
Our hearts to gratitude and love? Behold,
Far from the clamorous world our uplands lie;
No man will question us; we can be true
In silence and in blindness to his need.

BRIGITTA

When shall the child mount to thy hermitage?

BENEDICT

When the desire is on her, in God's name.
For when she comes my sombre cell grows bright,
Lofty and wide my chapel in the woods,
The Saviour breathes again and Mary laughs,
And I, crushed to the earth by the exceeding
Heaviness of my sins, can rise again
And, purified, look in God's kinder face.

BRIGITTA

[*Shaking her head.*

Ah, father, those are goodly words to hear,
Dark though they be. A changeling seems our child:
An alien spirit holds her in its power
Here, too, at home, in these last, troublous times,
But not the heavenly spirit thou speakest of!

BENEDICT

I doubt it not. When the Awakener's voice
Rouses us from the sleep of sin, not far

Or idle will the Prince of Darkness be.
Thus he afflicts this child. But she no more
Lies buried in the sleep of sin. Make free
Her path unto God's sanctuary, the way
To shelter and to grace! Oh, cross her not!
A light has come upon her suddenly,
As though a thousand hands invisible,
Angelic, drew this rough, unruly child
Unto God's altar. When in ecstasy
She lies there, in her deepest soul at one
With the Eternal, I have presage of
A miracle, a blessed one, that leads
Unfalteringly to the heavenly life.

BRIGITTA

God grant it! Amen. May it be so in truth.
Would she were more a saint beside the hearth!
But here she is graceless oft and darkly stirred
In spirit. And a dread upon me comes
Lest God, through her, decree my punishment.
Ah, father, no regret is in my soul! . . .
For that I love her I cannot repent.
The obdurate heart is sinful. But may God
Visit his wrath on me, not upon her.

BENEDICT

[*His composure shaken.*

We are all sinners — sinful and undone
Even from our mother's womb. And yet God turns
All things unto his glory, though they be
In weakness begotten and in sin conceived:
And this child's stainless soul and sinless lips
Shall at the throne of God, the all-merciful,
Mediate for us and accuse us not.

[*Exeunt* BENEDICT *and* BRIGITTA.

THE SECOND SCENE

OTTEGEBE *enters, pale and silent. She lays branches of fir which she has brought with her on the table; she breaks off smaller twigs and takes them to the crucifix. She kisses the feet of the wooden image and adorns it with greenery.* BRIGITTA *re-enters; she becomes aware of* OTTEGEBE *and watches her. Then she stops and listens to a passing noise that is heard without.*

BRIGITTA

Why do our maids shriek on the threshing-floor?

OTTEGEBE

[*Thoughtfully, softly, with emotion.*
A poor, sick man is begging in the court.

BRIGITTA

Who begs? Speak plainly! Dost thou hear me?

OTTEGEBE

Ay.
Mother, he is one of God's poorest poor.
[*The hollow sound of a leper's rattle is heard.*

BRIGITTA

Is 't not the terrible rattle that we hear?
Drive him from hence! By chance our lord may meet him.

OTTEGEBE

Why drive him, mother?

BRIGITTA

What is thy thought?

OTTEGEBE

Ah, mother,
Why should our lord not meet him in the court?

BRIGITTA

Because he must not, foolish lass! Be still!

OTTEGEBE

Lord Henry, mother, writeth in his chamber.

[*A pause.*]

But the good father thinks that were not men
Rebels against their God and his free grace,
Contemners of his love — did they not scorn
Through disobedience and blasphemy
The goodness of the ever-merciful,
Bitterly, blindly, He had not decreed
This evil to the world!

BRIGITTA

[*Busily at work over her dishes and pots, casts searching looks at* OTTEGEBE *by stealth.*

The times are bad
And sinful. Faith and honour are no more.
'Tis true!

OTTEGEBE

All Christendom, saith he,
Is so corroded by the Devil's venom,
That God would image forth to us our state,
And every leper's body, saith he, mother,
Is mirror of our fall from grace and good.

BRIGITTA

Perhaps!

OTTEGEBE

And sometimes doth he weep and scourge

His body, saying, mother, that all the world,
Being obdurate, had forfeited God's love
Whose face we shall not see forevermore.

BRIGITTA

[*Crosses herself.*
Praised be our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!
[*A silence.*]

OTTEGEBE

[*In growing exaltation.*
The father says that the last day is near,
The Hour of Judgment is at hand! O mother,
Is not thy soul in dread?

BRIGITTA

Sorrow and dread
Are daily trials of all mortal flesh.

OTTEGEBE

The deeps of the Abyss spew flame and smoke
And throttling vapours and pestilence and war,
Saith Father Benedict. The Angels of God's wrath
Fare through the cities of men, and there shall 'scape
No sinner, saith he, their avenging sword!

BRIGITTA

If retribution comes, 'twill come betimes.
Why give our souls to dread before that day?

OTTEGEBE

The black death spares nor lord nor potentate.

BRIGITTA

Nay.

OTTEGEBE

And not towers or battlements can guard
From leprosy.

BRIGITTA

Nay.

OTTEGEBE

And there was once a count,
Mother! — And he danced with the emperor's daughter
In the high hall. They were betrothed in secret!
Suddenly did the emperor's leech by name
And softly call the youth, and bade him go
Together with him far into a tower.
Then said the leech to him: "Show me thy hand!"
And when this prince and lord held forth his hand,
The master showed to him a hollow scar
In his white skin and spake these words — these words:
"Now is thy heaviest hour upon thee come!
Be steadfast! Thou art unclean!"

BRIGITTA

What wild tales
Tellest thou? Art in dreams?

OTTEGEBE

Nay . . . but the shawms
And flutes he heard no more that day . . .

BRIGITTA

[*Vehemently.*
Child! Child!

[BRIGITTA *by chance pushes a long kitchen knife from the table at which she is working.* OTTEGEBE *is so frightened*

that she shrinks suddenly, utters a half-suppressed shriek and trembles.

What is it? What ails thee?

OTTEGEBE

Nothing . . . nothing, mother.

BRIGITTA

Give me the knife!

[OTTEGEBE *bends over as she is bidden, though shaking and rattling her teeth as in fever. With a deep sigh she lays the knife back upon the table.*

BRIGITTA

Art thou not sick, my child?

OTTEGEBE

[*Shakes her head, scarce hearing.*

Mother, dost thou believe that Isaac knew,
Then when his father placed him before God,
What strange, dread purpose was in Abraham's soul?

BRIGITTA

Nay. But why speak thereof? Why does thy heart
Revolve these fearful tales of olden times?
Thank thy Creator that no more he asks
Unto his glory offerings of our blood.

OTTEGEBE

But Jesus? Did not God give his own son
To suffer for us on the bitter cross,
And take the thorny path to Golgotha
Clear-visioned? And if there were one to whom
'Twere given to endure unto the end
The extreme sorrow for his neighbour's sake

He would be called and chosen and most blessed
Above all men. The innocent blood poured forth
Willingly, mother, is like a fountain pure
Of our eternal weal. Even upon earth
It has a power miraculous; the body
Of the poor leper, if besprent with it
Will be made clear and whole.

BRIGITTA

Perhaps! Perhaps!

OTTEGEBE

Mother, knowest thou what our bondmen say?

BRIGITTA

Nay.

OTTEGEBE

That if there were justice in this world,
With staff and rattle would he beg his bread . . .

BRIGITTA

Who?

OTTEGEBE

. . . Even as that sick man in our court,
And build his hovel in the outcasts' field.

BRIGITTA

The seed of folly beareth its own fruit.
Go, child, and spread the evening meal for us.
Our lord is sick, but only in his mind.
And if upon him lay the grisly snow
Of leprosy, what man could save him then?
No leech, no priest, no sacrificial blood!

OTTEGEBE

[*Almost weeping in her extreme emotion.*
Ay, mother! Far in Italy, in Salerno
There lives a master who can heal with blood.

BRIGITTA

Who says it?

OTTEGEBE

Ottacker! He swears it true,
And Father Benedict confirmed his truth.

BRIGITTA

'Tis well. Perhaps. It may be. Let me hear
No more of that — no more! Go to thy work
In silence. No one is ill, no sacrifice
Is needed, whatsoever that mad fellow
Foisted upon thy child's credulity.
Soon will our lord be well and fare from hence.

OTTEGEBE

[*Breaking out in desperate sobs.*
Ah, mother, mother, if he were to go . . .

BRIGITTA

Lord Henry? May God grant it! Thou dost weep?
Thinkest thou our poor hut of beams, our pond
Wherein ducks chatter, or our kitchen-garden
Are places of disport and exercise
For this right regal soul?

OTTEGEBE

[*Sobbing.*
I would . . . I would
Hide in a nunnery! Thinkest thou I might,
If it should please ye one day to betroth me
Unto a peasant . . .

BRIGITTA

Time will bring us wisdom!
God will fulfil his purpose and such pride
He too will chasten as the years go by.

But this I tell thee: If on some future day
A worthy lad of simple peasant stock
Come to demand thee at thy father's hand,
Thou shouldst be humbly grateful to thy God.

THE THIRD SCENE

GOTTFRIED *leads in* SIR HARTMANN OF AUË. *The latter is a simple knight, some years older than* HENRY, *with beard already grey. He wears light armour, casque, sword, spurs, and carries a long fur-coat over his arm.*

GOTTFRIED

Sir knight, enter my house. 'Tis cold without!
Here burns a merry fire for our need
Of warmth on this bleak day.
[*To* BRIGITTA.
Where is our lord?
Mother, this is Sir Hartmann of the Fields,
Lord Henry's servant and most trusty friend;
A valiant ride, from Auë's castle here
In winter tide. Rest thyself now.

HARTMANN

Much thanks!
The air blows keen and from the sombre North
Came straight into my face. But my dun steed
Did gallant service on the mountain heights;
And though, at times, we lost us in the clouds,
And blinded by the whirling snow could find
Nor path nor track, yet we pressed forward still
And, step by step, climbed on. 'Tis my delight
Dreamlike to ride through wintry silences,
Slowly to rise from peak to mountainous peak
Through the white thickets of the snow-clad firs,
Whose heavy branches, glazed with glittering ice,

Tinkle and creak in the wind's path — to hear
No other sound in the white solitude.
[*Kindly to* Ottegebe.
And though the little birds no music make,
Yet at each step beneath my horse's hoof
The crisp snow twitters, and I listen and dream
And almost lose myself in faery thoughts,
Like Peter, the old friar, when he heard
The bird of Paradise singing and to him
A thousand years passed like one fleeting hour.

Brigitta

Rest thee awhile, sir knight!

Hartmann

This little maid —
Is she thy daughter?

Brigitta

Ay, our only one.

Hartmann

And, or I err, Lord Henry's little spouse?

Brigitta

Ay, in old days of early childhood, oft
When that our gracious lord, himself a boy,
Was gamesome in his mood, then many a time
In jest he called her thus.

Gottfried

Nay, mother, still
He calls her so. But yesterday beside
This chimney, when our little Ottegebe
Placed him a footstool for his greater ease,
I heard him speak: "I thank thee, Ottegebe,
My little spouse!" Is it not true?

OTTEGEBE

Ay, father.

HARTMANN

Ay, it is true indeed. And thou, my child,
Let no one rob thee of that honoured name,
Which is thy right. For not in idle jest
Calls he her thus, not as thou deemest, good friend,
But from his very heart, as in these letters
Wherein are gentlest praise of her, and thanks
For faithful goodness and untiring care.

[OTTEGEBE, *who is holding her mother's hand, presses it so violently in her excessive embarrassment and consternation that* BRIGITTA *is tempted to cry out.*

BRIGITTA

Child! Look ye! What's come over her? My hand
Aches from her grasp!

[OTTEGEBE *laughs, lifts her arm to her eyes and runs out.*

GOTTFRIED

Ay, 'tis the truth that she
Merits some simple praise. For hitherto
She was the prey of many a shifting mood . . .

BRIGITTA

Water thy wine of praise, I beg thee, Gottfried!
That wine is heady and her heart is young.

[*Exit* BRIGITTA.

THE FOURTH SCENE

HARTMANN

Tell me, above all else: How fares our lord?

GOTTFRIED

[*Regards* HARTMANN, *sighs and says:*
How fares our lord? Sir knight, the question's
hard,
And harder than thou deemest is the answer.
I know not, truly. Often doth he seem
As blithe as ever in his happiest days;
And, at some other hour, sorry and sick,
More stricken than we deem. At times I think
Some secret woe corrodes his inmost heart,
Whereof, perhaps, thou canst relate the cause . . .
Suddenly often, by some chance, his eye
Full of strange fever meets me, and my breast
And throat are throttled, and an inward voice
Tells me that God hath visited this man
Direly with sorrows unendurable.

HARTMANN

Thou knowest that our lord did call me here?

GOTTFRIED

I knew it not.

HARTMANN

'Tis so. He bade me come.
And did he not reveal aught else to thee?

GOTTFRIED

Nay, naught, Sir Hartmann. For behold, our lord
More solitary lives than any monk
Austerely in his convent's narrow walls.
Often two words when that she brings his food
To Ottegebe, are his only speech
All the long day. Deeply he reads his scrolls
Holds vigil through the night and sleeps by day.
And if I meet him in his wanderings
By chance, at the field's edge, or in a wood,

And bare my head in greeting, from afar
He answers me, unswerving on his path
Of solitude. Thus weeks passed after weeks
Wherein nor I spake to him nor Brigitta
Only the maiden, and even her at times
Some harsh word from his lips would sore affright.

HARTMANN

The time has come, though it is secret yet —
Surely if I his letters read aright —
When the brief days are numbered which our lord
Will stay to rest him here beneath thy roof.

GOTTFRIED

I marked it well that something was afoot.
It overcame us all. But yestereve
Our dear lord sate upon the armchair here
And suddenly spake so strangely and so sad
After long silence, with familiar kindness,
That tears came to our eyes as though he meant
A long farewell. And so 'twill come about
Even as our hearts foreboded. Unto which
Of all his keeps and castles will he fare?

HARTMANN

Whither he now will fare, I know it not.
He must return unto the world. The need
Is great. At Auë he must show himself
Unto his vassals lest he be forgotten.
Men ask, men whisper, and his cousin Conrad
Is prodigal of words and rears his head,
Clashes his spurs beneath the castle-gate,
And takes upon himself as though our lord
Were gathered to his fathers in the tomb.

GOTTFRIED

Sir knight, our loss is great if now he go —
And surely, he will go. Behold, our life . . .
Narrowed in an eternal monotone!
Separate from all the world, hemmed in by hills,
In forest and valley which, by Lord Henry's grace,
Are ours beyond dispute. Thus do we live
Through equal days; we hear the selfsame voices,
And when the soul, oppressed by green and leaves,
Calls out for man, naught answers it except
An echo from the innumerable trees.
Thus is it true, though strange thou deem my words,
That this sick man and melancholy guest
Yet fills our chambers with a festive glow
While he among us dwells. Now from afar
Beckons the spectre of the commonplace,
Approaching in its trailing garb of grey.
Despite all care and toil and anxious thoughts
It was a luminous time for our poor dale
Which now draws to its close.

HARTMANN

Thou tellest this tale
To me? His friend and sharer of his tent,
Who followed him o'erseas, and, many a year
Moved never from his side? Ye never saw
Our lord in the full splendour of the light
Pouring on him of the imperial grace —
The exquisite, proud soul! The noble dames
Drank maddening potions from his radiant glance,
And regal ladies for his pledges fought,
His kerchief, hem and shawl. Three courts of love
And courtesy could not restore their peace.
He was the star in Frederic's crown and shed
A light divine upon it, and we all

Were sharers in the glory of his gifts.
He was the centre of the imperial camp,
And Henry, Henry's words and Henry's songs,
And Henry's huntsmen, leech, horse, hound, and hawk
Were on all tongues, more than his majesty
The emperor, who went not to his board
But that Lord Henry strode beside him there.

GOTTFRIED

[*Who has grown more and more restless.*
I hear him come.

THE FIFTH SCENE

[HENRY *has entered swiftly and unexpectedly. He looks neglected, perturbed, and pale.*

HARTMANN

[*Who had sat down, springs to his feet in consternation, shocked by* HENRY'S *appearance.*
My dear, my honoured lord!

HENRY

[*Involuntarily makes a protesting gesture and frowns as though* HARTMANN'S *loud eagerness were causing him physical pain. Then he says lightly with enforced coldness:*
So thou art come?

HARTMANN

Ay, lord!

HENRY

I knew it not.

HARTMANN

[*Concealing his profound perturbation with difficulty.*

My dear and gracious lord, how dost thou fare?

HENRY

[*With harsh briefness.*

I thank thee! Gottfried, where is Ottegebe?

GOTTFRIED

I will away and seek her.

HENRY

Do thou so.

[*Exit* GOTTFRIED.

THE SIXTH SCENE

HENRY

[*Sits down on the armchair. He looks behind him, then regards* HARTMANN *struggling with his emotion. When* HENRY *speaks his voice is husky and almost hollow from long silence. He forces himself to calm.*

Why dost thou stand? Rest thee! How farest thou, Hartmann?
What is it, friend?

HARTMANN

My dearest, dearest lord!

HENRY

[*In a hollow, deep, soft and quivering voice which breaks at times under the strain of great emotion forcibly held in check.*

Ay — dearest, dearest lord! — does that avail?
Thinkest thou I have summoned thee to watch

The wringing of thy hands, to hear thee call
Me lord and master, gracious, honoured, dear?
Come if thou hast an hour to spare me, draw
Yon stool unto the fire, so that we may
Like men take council in the time of need.

[HARTMANN *moves the stool forward. Before he sits down, he drops on one knee to kiss* HENRY'S *hand.*

HENRY

[*Withdrawing his hand with violence.*
Let be, for these are follies! Rest thee here.

[HARTMANN *rises and turns away, stealthily wiping his eyes.*

HENRY

So thou art come despite all things, good friend,
Though many a one has fled from me for months!
Hast thou no dread? Fearest thou not at all?

[*Measuring* HARTMANN *with a swift glance.*

What didst thou think when that the summons came,
My valiant Hartmann? Didst thou dream, perchance,
Thou wouldst receive new songs of me or be,
As in old days, my yearning's messenger
Unto some spotless lady? — Nay, my friend!
True; I have often suffered ill through love!
But nevermore again. That pain is drowned
In greater sorrow. Ay, whatever else
On any day of pain or agony
Oppressed me heavily or grieved me sore
Is now so buried in that greater woe,
That I must deem the sorrows of my past
As jewels lost in ocean! — but enough!

I fare right passably.— What is 't they say,
My goodly cousins out in the great world,
My excellent kith and kin? What of it that I
Dwell many days here in these forest depths,
Close hidden as a badger in his hole.
What do they say? What does their wisdom see?
How do they look upon it?

HARTMANN

My dear lord,
Spare me, if may be, to recount to thee
Such rumours, partly evil, partly good,
As the world breeds — this world in which we live —
Since suddenly or without cause or clue
Thou turn'dst thy back to it.

HENRY

And do they say
That, excommunicate as the emperor's friend,
I had felt the curse of God upon me fall?

HARTMANN

Spare me!

HENRY

Speak freely and hide nothing, friend!
Their lies, though with envenomed arrows barbed
Will still fall short of the most dreadful truth,
And therefore, trust me, I can laugh at them.
But this is dark to thee.

[OTTEGEBE *enters.*

Were men to say
That like a Saracen I bore myself,
Carried a silken turban on my head,
Chose me a white steed of Arabian blood,
Whose harness, tinkling to the Prophet's weal,

Glittered with golden crescents manifold,
And that therefor the God of Christendom
Had set Aleppo's mark upon me — he
Who spake these things, would yet not lie enough.

HARTMANN

What is Aleppo's sign of which thou speakest?

HENRY

Naught! 'Tis set down in books. Search for it there!
Enough! No more!

[*To* OTTEGEBE.

Come hither, Ottegebe.
Betake thee swiftly to my chamber, child.
Upon my table are my parchments, writ
By mine own hand, and guarded by my seal.
Bring them to me.

OTTEGEBE

Ay, lord.

[OTTEGEBE *exit.*

HENRY

Behold, this child
Is my unpurchased, voluntary slave,
And all my lowly serfs and all my troupe
Of eunuchs, runners, never could exceed
Her single service. Had I a hundred wishes,
Ay, or a thousand betwixt sun and sun,
Her zeal would find them easy and beseech,
Insatiable, humbly faithful still
For other service in the love of me.
Well then, what do I lack? My beard, perchance,
Grows somewhat wild and weed-like, it may be
I am scented not with musk and ambergris
As in the emperor's house — well, then, mayhap,
My odour is more pleasing unto God

Who, it would seem, frowns on the fragrances
Of Araby.— Am I more like the beasts?
'Tis well. Perchance I shall slough off this me
Some day, and, as is fabled in old tales,
Out of the beast will issue forth the saint.

HARTMANN

My lord and friend! My dear and gracious lord!
Let me beseech thee to make clear thy thoughts.
I beg of thee! If that some unknown grief
Gnaws at thy heart in such mysterious wise,
Then put an end to this secretiveness,
That I with thee, my friend and master, may
Take up my arms against this hidden foe.
What cruel blow was dealt thee?

HENRY

[*With a calming gesture, uttering the words with difficulty.*

Naught, my friend.
No blow was dealt me. Tell me: Was not Gehazi
A servant of Elisha?

HARTMANN

My dear lord . . .

HENRY

Dost thou know why I ask this of thee, Hartmann?

HARTMANN

Nay, lord, I am unlearned in Holy Writ.

HENRY

By Candlemas thou'lt know it well enough.
[*A silence.*]
Have patience with me, O my valiant friend!
'Tis a confessor's trade. Let it suffice thee

To know that I on pilgrimage am bound,
Swiftly like unto him who Mecca seeks,
But ask not to what stead!

HARTMANN

Lord Henry, not
As friend should speak to friend, thy words to me.
But 'tis my duty still to search and ask,
Nor to desist while any way is left
Of questioning, to rest not till I learn
What gnaws in secret at thy health and heart.
What blow was it, what mischief dire that thrust
Thee sudden from thy chosen path? Thou stood'st
Magnificently in the triumphant light
Of joyance. Oh, thy foot did scarcely press
The earth on which thou troddest, and it seemed
As though an angel held his shield o'er thee
In joust and battle, in all trials and deeds.
Far faring in God's honour didst thou come
Homeward, thyself with honour richly deckt.
Fame heralded thy coming. But instead
Of gathering the glad harvest of thy deeds,
Thy golden ears rot in the abandoned field.
Was not the emperor's hand stretched out in grace
Above thee? Did not his full heart pour forth
Its gratitude? Did not his favour grant
Thee noblest meed — a daughter of the house
Of Hohenstaufen? Speak, oh, speak at last!
Why didst thou flee, in the high name of God,
Into this solitude, spurning thy fate,
And leaving that which nevermore returns.

HENRY

[*Turns and looks at him long with great and sorrowful eyes. When he begins to*

speak his voice is husky and he is forced to begin anew.

Life is a brittle vessel, O my friend,
The Koran saith, and look ye, it is true.
And I have learned that truth. I would not live
In a blown egg's void shell. Wouldst thou exalt
The glory and the grandeur that are man,
Or call him even in God's image made?
Scratch him but with a tailor's shears — he bleeds!
Prick him but gently with a cobbler's awl
Where the pulse beats, or here, or there, or here,
And swiftly, irresistibly, will gush
Even like a liberated fountain, forth
His pride, his joy, his noble soul and sense,
Divine illusion, all his love and hate
And wealth and glory and guerdon of his deeds —
All, all, in brief, that he, blind error's slave,
Did deem his very own! Be emperor, sultan, pope,
A naked body huddled in a shroud
Art thou — to-day, to-morrow, cold therein and still!

HARTMANN

Thus speaks the darkest mood.

HENRY

Once it was light!
Ah, dancing, well-nigh I unlearned to walk;
Echoing songs of praise my lips forgot
Almost the use of speech, and all my life
Turned heavenward in unfaltering faith — one joy,
One prayer, one brimming reverence to God!
But faring home, home, in the idle dream
Of divine nearness, my soul jubilant
With song seraphic — with the exalted deed

Behind me, with the consecrated sword —
Afar, already, lay upon my track,
Whining, the foul hounds of my fate, their maws
Snapping the empty air in greed of blood.
Find me the huntsman who did set them on,
That I exact my vengeance!

[*He has arisen and walks about.*

[Ottegebe *brings in the parchments and waits in silence.*

Henry

Hear my words!

Hartmann

Henchman of priests I am not and not priest,
Thou knowest it. But into my soul thy words
So strange, so dreadful, strike like living fire.
Whatever fate has met thee, whatsoever
The Eternal Judge has unto thee decreed —
Bow in humility! Take up thy cross!

Henry

I am the emperor's vassal and with him
Once from the Cardinal of Ostia
Took the crusader's cross. It stayed with me.
Once it was only stitched upon my coat,
Since it has grown deep into flesh and blood,
And only death, some day — what wouldst thou more? —
Will cleave me and my cross asunder! Friend,
Spare me thy lamentations; they are lost
Upon me at this tide.

[*To* Ottegebe.

Go, little spouse!
I thank thee but I do not need thee more.
If thou wouldst knit me gloves of snowy wool,
Haste thee! Easily may they come too late.

Go! What I must reveal unto this knight,
Is meet for his ears only, not for thine.
[*Exit* Ottegebe.
'Tis well. This parchment from my table brought
Contains whatever Henry, Count of Auë,
May still desire in your world . . . Be still,
My friend, break not into my speech. Be wary
To give good heed to these last words of mine;
For thou shalt be my messenger and place
This script into my Uncle Bernard's hands.
'Tis my last will — be silent, O my friend!
Hasty and rash is man, the Koran saith.—
What has befallen me . . . what I have suffered . . .
Seek not to know. Think that new wisdom came
In vision to me; ask not what it was,
Nor how mine eyes waxed clear. Oh, take no thought!
Thy pious spirit cannot fare so far
Into life's waste, that thou canst fathom it.
Let be! Who loves me will no farther ask.
What knowledge will avail is here set down.
Leave me what mine is, and let that suffice!
But I will set forth on my wandering,
Freely, O friend, on the appointed way,
And without faltering, straight! — For that I should
Like other cripples, line the public streets,
Or writhe, another Lazarus, in the mire,
Flaunt high my shame and glory in my sores,
And croak for dogs to lick them for mine ease,
Is not recorded in the Book of Fate.
And were it so, by God, I'd blot it out! —
Farewell! And when a year hath passed away,
Then is my sorrow dead by just that space,

And o'er my lamentable grave the rain
In many, many mild balsamic showers
Has rustled gently down.— Farewell! Farewell!
[*After a brief, unearthly pause, he breaks out.*
But now I bid thee gather thy clean garb
About thee, friend, and flee! I tell thee, flee!
Shake from thy feet the poisoned dust and flee!
And if a man would seize thee by thy coat,
Leave the rent raiment in his hand and flee
And flee and flee!

HARTMANN

[*In utter consternation.*
What words are those, dear lord?

HENRY

I tell thee, flee! Look not behind but flee!
Touch not my hand, but flee! Touch not my hand!
For I have been so blessèd by high heaven,
That I must spew destruction round about!
Oh, I am such a hero that brave men
Flee my unweaponed hand; my very touch
Breeds evil more detestable than death.
The maiden whom my lightest glance has brushed
Dies of the utter loathliness thereof!
[OTTEGEBE *has entered. Pale as a waxen image, she follows* HENRY'S *wild outburst with quivering lips and fixed eyes.*

HARTMANN

Come to thy senses, lord! Thou ravest — mad!

HENRY

Grasp a tree's heavy branch or thy sword's hilt,
Whatever is at hand, and strike me down!
Deliver thyself and me of me at once!

What is 't ye do when a mad, slavering cur
Invades your courtyard in the light of day?
Why do ye linger? Haste ye! Oh, be brave!
[Gottfried *and* Brigitta *rush in.*

Henry

All of ye, all of ye, come and behold:
Henry of Auë, who thrice upon each day
Bathed his white limbs, who blew each speck of dust
From sleeve and collar — this proud prince and lord
And man and fop is with Job's boils and soreness
Now blessèd from his sole unto his crown!
Still living he became a carrion mass,
Hurled on the loathly refuse-heap of earth,
Where he may gather him a broken shard
To scratch his scabs withal!

[*In* Ottegebe's *face there has gradually appeared, rising from her inmost soul, a strange, joyous, rapt ecstasy. As* Henry *breaks down, there is wrung from her soul a cry of the blessedness of liberation. She throws herself at* Henry's *feet and covers his hands with kisses.*

Ottegebe

O dearest lord!
Lord, my dear lord! Think of the Lamb of God!
I know . . . I will . . . and I can bear thy sins!
Oh, I have vowed it! Thou shalt be redeemed!

THE THIRD ACT

A rocky wilderness. Mighty fir-trees and trees with foliage of autumnal colouring. In the background a cave is visible beyond a stretch of level earth. The entrance to the cave is framed by a scaffolding of rough boards. Beneath this scaffolding lie withered leaves, cooking utensils, an axe, an arquebus. It is an evening of Autumn.

THE FIRST SCENE

HENRY, *wild, ragged and unkempt, with unshorn hair and beard, digs a deep pit in the foreground. His left hand is bandaged.* OTTACKER, *in full armour, just as he has dismounted, appears upon a projection of rock, careful to preserve the distance between himself and* HENRY.

OTTACKER

[*Calls out.*

Ho! Thou! Out yonder! Ho, there! Hither! Thou!

HENRY

[*Listens; then murmurs between his teeth.*

Ho, thou there! Holla! Ho! Leave me in peace!

OTTACKER

Ho, there! Old bear o' the woods! What diggest thou?

HENRY

[*As before.*

A pit in the earth, for mine eternal weal.

OTTACKER

Digg'st thou for water or for treasure-trove?

HENRY

[*To himself.*

Ay, never digged I for a richer hoard.

[*Aloud.*

Come hither! Look! Thou hast the manhood! Come!

OTTACKER

[*With nervous hesitation.*

Art thou not one of the outcasts of the fields?
Ho there! Bestir thyself, old acorn-eater!

HENRY

[*Snatches his arquebus and aims at* OTTACKER.

Ay, to good purpose I'll bestir myself.

OTTACKER

[*Protecting his face with his armoured arm.*

Thou scurfy toad!

HENRY

White-livered wretch!

OTTACKER

Thou vermin!
Accursed, poisonous spider, wilt thou sting?
Shoot! Hast thou closed thy last accounts with life?

HENRY

With life and death, fellow, and so I'll shoot!

OTTACKER

Hold! One word more! One word, thou hairy wight!
Wert thou well dead, Satan would ask in vain!
Dwells not Poor Henry in these forest-lands?

HENRY

What game is that?

OTTACKER

A game with mangy fur,
But once the eagle's and the lion's kin!

HENRY

Who art thou?

OTTACKER

That's beside the purpose, friend.
A horseman, well approved in storm and war.

HENRY

And yet the veriest craven in the sun!

OTTACKER

What?

HENRY

That!

OTTACKER

What sayest thou? Pray thy last prayer!
[*He makes a gesture as though about to rush at* HENRY.

HENRY

I'll pray two prayers. Why comest thou not here?

OTTACKER

'Twould ill beseem to slaughter a poor cur.
Run on thy way. But tell me: Does not here,
Outcast and sick, the Count of Auë dwell,
Who hied him from his farmstead, some days gone?

HENRY

A count escaped? And from a farmstead here?
Did a tarantula sting thee by chance?

OTTACKER

[With a wild, exaggerated laugh which shows that he has drunk too deeply.
I'm mad enough! Else would I seek him out?

HENRY

Come hither!

OTTACKER

Here I stand!

HENRY

Approach in peace!
'Tis honestly spoken, void of ill or guile.
A mangy count? That is a tale to hear!

OTTACKER

[Seats himself on a ledge of rock.
Peace, then, and harmony! Keep thy distance, friend,
And hearken to my words. There lies a farm
Seven hours from here, hidden in trees and grass,
And tributary to my leprous lord
To whom, God knows, I keep my given faith.
Ay! Dost thou stare? Into the land o' the Moors
I fared with him in battle; at his side
I clashed the heathen helmets till they flared,
And speared the Moslem horses. Many a sword
I hurled aside so that it sawed the air
And not my master's throat. 'Tis sooth. At last
Came this repulsive evil unto him.
And why? He jeered at my amulets; he laughed

Scornfully at all simples, spells and charms!
I'll say no more! Still faithful to my lord
I hid me with him on this farmstead here,
Till he escaped and fled into the hills.

HENRY

Thou seekest him? What wouldst thou of him now?

OTTACKER

Why, by our Lady, blockhead, I would naught.
From evil venoms may our Lord protect me.
I would not take aught that he has from him.
I bear a message.

[*He throws money toward* HENRY.

Here is good, coined gold!
Give him the news! Thou'rt sure to meet him — thou!
Birds of a feather — as the adage says.

HENRY

Keep the base trash! Thou darest not come here;
Too cowardly to find him whom thou seekst,
Thou'dst give to me thy errand for three farthings.

OTTACKER

[*After a deep draught from his leathern bottle.*

What? Cowardly? I? Ottacker? Look ye now!
But two days since Sir Hartmann spoke to us —
A knight sans fear and sans reproach, and now
Viceroy of our lord at Auë keep —
He said: Is there among ye one who dare
Seek me the stricken lion in his den?
Then I stepped forth from out the crowd and laughed:
I, I am brave enough to do the deed.

HENRY

[*Softly and with sombre irony.*
Thou faithful henchman, come unto my breast!

OTTACKER

[*As* HENRY *makes a move as though to approach him, leaps backward.*
Demons of hell, who art thou?

HENRY

Have no fear.
'Tis I myself — Thy mangy Lord of Auë.

OTTACKER

[*Stares at him, recognises him, falls upon his knees and wrings his hand beseeching and yet warding off.*
Have mercy on me, Master, judge me not!
For I was true to thee at every hour,
Save that one hour in which I rode away.
Against all storms we hold thy castle now!
I lay before thy tent, lord, many a night
In other days, my hand grown to my sword,
That thou mightst safely sleep — and never stirred.
Forgive one who repents him of his sin.
Thou art excommunicate, but Hartmann says:
That no priest's craft can bind the Hand of Grace.
Sick art thou, but Sir Hartmann says again,
That, if God will, thou shalt in truth be healed.
Forgotten art thou and declared as dead
By all and by thy noble kinsman Conrad.
But a full thousand of us took a vow
Among ourselves and by God's blessed mother
To hold the fort for thee while thou dost live.

HENRY

[*With feigned heartiness.*

Forgiven and forgotten! Nobly done!
We'll say no more. Forgiven and forgotten.
True wert thou and true art thou. Come to me,
Thou trusty friend. I know thy courage well.
I saw thee as a wolf among the herds
Scatter the foe and slay. Come to my hearth,
And I will strike the steel and light the wood,
And be thy servant, not thy master, once.

OTTACKER

[*After a violent struggle with himself.*

Nay, but I cannot!

HENRY

[*With apparent unconsciousness of that struggle.*

What?

OTTACKER

I must away!

HENRY

And why?

OTTACKER

Sir Hartmann bids . . .

HENRY

He is my vassal,
And if I bid thee stay with me, then stay . . .

OTTACKER

[*After a renewed struggle.*

By Heaven, I cannot! Take the arquebus
And hurl the iron bolt into my head!

HENRY

A bolt! O lily-livered knave, say rather,
A rag, a strap, a horse's wretched blanket
Is yet too noble a weapon against thee.
[*He stretches forth his hands.*
One! Two! Away! Get hence! . . . Three!
Four! Avaunt!

OTTACKER

[*Receding.*
Dear lord, accept the refuge! Heal thyself:
Others have done it . . . a child's blood will do 't.
Attempt it manfully . . .

HENRY

Five and six! Enough!
Braggart and coward! Look how he runs and runs!
[*With outstretched arms he hastens toward* OTTACKER *who flees in mad terror.*

THE SECOND SCENE

[HENRY, *left alone, breaks out into wild laughter. The laughter grows into a cry of pain, almost a sob. He controls himself, is silent for a space and then speaks.*

HENRY

'Tis well. Silence — my realm. I am equipped
With bravest armour. And my own still world
Rises again about me — me alone.
I am not lonely. Nay. The solitude
Slays not my heart. Though I am buried deep
In the crystalline, icy heart of space,
I am not lonely in the stillness pure
That holds no clash of shard, no rattle of shame,

But like the eternal sea, in height and depth,
Is pure, free, radiant. . . . What do I lack? . . .
To work!

[*He continues to dig his grave.*

From mould thou camest; mould thou becomest too.
O sleep of life, O deeper sleep of death —
Beggar and king.— In thy deep silence, death,
In thy dun garment of the wormy earth,
What secret holdest thou? Hurled into life,
Blindly as by a pitiless hangman's grasp,
Are we, begotten by the rage and fray
Of elemental lust! That lure of sin
Grasps in its net, night after night, the hosts
Of folly, to dumb lechery dedicate.
Is life a prison and its vassals we?
And art thou, Death, the warder at the gate,
Who, for a space, prevents our exit hence?
Words! Words! Dumb are we all from birth, and dumb
In the strife of being, dumb before man and God.
Or else earth's stones themselves are eloquent
And brothers — I in my woe am not alone —
And the whole world's one grief and one delight.

THE THIRD SCENE

[Father Benedict *appears at the edge of the clearing.*

Benedict

[*Calls hesitatingly.*

God greet thee! God be with thee, poor Lord Henry!

Henry

[*Listens. To himself.*

A rattling brass or shard — the voice of man!

BENEDICT

[*Walks quietly across the clearing and lays his hand, from behind, on* HENRY's *shoulder.*

A friend.

HENRY

Who's there?

BENEDICT

What diggest thou?

HENRY

My grave.
What wouldst thou here?

BENEDICT

I would do good. I bring thee
Wine, flour and fruit and fresh-baked wheaten bread.

HENRY

Go! Get thee hence, or, little monk, I'll nail thee
Above the gate as though thou wert an owl.
Get thee to thy cloister, to thy cave and hole
Like the brown adder.

BENEDICT

Gracious lord, I came . . .

HENRY

Nay, get thee gone! Vanish into thin air
That I see thee no more, or else make me
To vanish into air and see thee not.
I am not this nor that, nor lord nor liege
To thee, nor sick nor well, nor am I naked,
Nor in these rags — for thee! Neither am I shorn
Nor unshorn, bald-pate! Dost thou take me? Hence!
I am nothing, nothing, nothing! Get thee gone!

BENEDICT

Whatever in his error man may deem,
He is God's child forever.

HENRY

[*Leaping up suddenly, lays his spade aside.*
What sayest thou?
God's blood, thou little monk! Come here and rest,
If thou so lovest ordure, boils and scabs . . .
Who makes me laugh this day must be my friend.
Be welcome, then. God's child? Eh? Was it that?
How dost thou know? Canst thou declare the cause?
I am a child, perchance, and this my cradle . . .
I must record such wisdom in my books.

BENEDICT

I know it well, my poor, dear lord, thou art
In thrall to heaviness, bitter visitations . . .

HENRY

Thou callest me poor? Who is the beggar, monk?
Come to this bush where the wild roses blow,
Into the nettles and the yarrow — come!
Open thine eyes, and far as vision reaches,
All that thou seest is mine, O beggar, mine.
From the proud forest to the rolling plain,
From the tall mountains unto Constance lake,
The wooded hills, the harvests of the vale!
And though the fruit and wheat be garnered now,
The wealth within my granaries is stored.
Mine is the game, the grass, the brooklet's fish,
Foliage and needle, ay, each single leaf's
Fibre and spine. The gossamers that cling
To thee were woven by my servant spider,

The midge's string that cleaves into thy flesh
Is rifled from my treasury.

BENEDICT

Ay, and yet . . .

HENRY

There was a sting! Thou sayest it. I was weary
Playing the master's part, alone and wrapped
In silken doublet and in narrow shoon,
Slave of my servants, flatterers and friends,
Seeing the world through veils of ceremony.
Weary was I of standing on a mount,
Forced to incline my head if I would speak,
And not to see the man to whom I spoke.
The miserable serf strives to the light
Of the world's freedom, and the lord who would
Be free . . . a fellow of the living world . . .
Must burrow deep into the lap of earth,
As I do now.

[*He leaps into the grave.*

BENEDICT

Oh, rise again, dear lord!
Or let me kneel with thee and let us lift
Our hearts together to the throne of Him
Who was and is and shall be.

HENRY

[*Leaping from the grave.*
He lifts up!
Not thou! Not I! According to His mood,
Not for thy whining or thy human thought!
Oh, were it otherwise, would not hands move Him
That crave His mercy with their shattered nails,
Corroded countenances, void of lips
That seek Him with their eyeless hollows blind,

And stammering tongues that strive in vain to form
The words that name Him and implore His grace?
Were He thus moved, this earth would be all heaven,
We would be gods, or else our Lord and God
Had died — not once for ruth and pity of us —
Ten times he had died, an hundred times — and lay
In the forgotten coffin of this world.
Dost take me, monk?

BENEDICT

My lord, God lives! Believe me
Seek Him in spirit and in truth and He . . .

HENRY

So thou hast come to tell me that He lives?
'Tis well. I thank thee. Go! For what thou sayest
Behold, I have learned it in my silence here
And solitude. Oh, I know that He lives.
Most truly was He with me ere a monk
Came and thus drove him hence! The truth is there —
Although thou shak'st thine head in unbelief.
God was with me and is. He is a God
Crushing the eye that seeks him, tearing forth
The heart that loves him, a God that snaps in two
The arms of children unto Him stretched out.
And what a man, in passing by, may hear,
At times, if he have ears, is jeering laughter.
[*With a wild laugh.*
God laughs! God laughs!
[*Changed suddenly, restrained, harshly.*
What seekest thou here?

BENEDICT

But thee —
Thy gentle heart of other days, thy counsel,
A little patience . . .

HENRY

Then be brief, be brief!
Soon comes the time when I must feed mine owl,
And my good spider weaving busily.
And so begin.

BENEDICT

I am a messenger
Accredited by naught but my poor cowl,
And farmer Gottfried . . .

HENRY

[*Leaps up and hurls a stone into the bushes.*
Get thee hence! What is it
That thou comest seeking at Poor Henry's court?
Ho, wardel! Huntsman, ho! Unleash the dogs!
Eavesdropping? Oh, I'll teach thee!

THE FOURTH SCENE

[GOTTFRIED, *detected, emerges from the bushes in which he was hidden.*

GOTTFRIED

Dearest lord,
'Tis I, thy farmer Gottfried.

BENEDICT

Truly, yes.
'Tis he. Nor idle folly drives him here,
But sore anxiety and bitter need.

HENRY

[*Looks at him long and movelessly. Then speaks calmly.*

Arise! What is 't with thee? Arise and come.
Who died to thee? What envious star has cast
Its venomous light upon thy modest house
And banned its peace?

GOTTFRIED

[*Hesitating, almost in tears.*
My daughter, dearest lord . . .

HENRY

The keen smoke bites mine eyelids . . . Is she dead?

GOTTFRIED

Nay.

BENEDICT

Gottfried, let me speak for thee to-day,
And tell the tale in brief. For was I not
The child's confessor in this difficult time?
'Tis true; she lives. Oh, she does live, but since
Thou didst abandon Gottfried's peaceful farm,
A strange and alien life, most strangely changed,
Not as in other days. It is a life,
Lived as beyond the world in which we breathe,
Not to be fathomed. Nor is her nourishment
Of earthly food, but of wild flames within
That burn her body hollow.

GOTTFRIED

Gracious lord,
She will not eat nor comfort her but lies,
Staring with fixed eyes unto the sky,
Waiting for one . . . thinking of one . . . unchanged.

BENEDICT

[*Gently thrusting* GOTTFRIED *back.*

Patience! 'Tis true, dear lord. The while we here
Plead with thee, driven by her strange resolve,
She lies upon her couch which she has stripped
Of every comfort but the barren straw,
Stiff, moveless as wood itself, uncomforted
By food or drink through fully fifty hours.

HENRY

[*Sits down and scrapes carrots.*
Speak plainly! Is she ill? Then fetch a leech.
Were I physician I would heal myself.
Why, brother bald-pate, come ye then to me?
Take camomile and physic! children's ills
That seem so great are often, in good truth,
Of cause right laughable. And if she be more
Than a mere child — haste to place at her side
That which makes sickly virgins grow into
Wives strong and buxom.

BENEDICT

My dear lord, right well
I know her who have tended her so long . . .

GOTTFRIED

'Tis true, good father, but I know her better . . .

BENEDICT

She comes to me with all her youthful woes.

GOTTFRIED

And she has been with me day after day
Since first she drew her breath in this hard world.

BENEDICT

Then do thou speak.

GOTTFRIED

Truly our lord is right.
'Tis of her years. They trouble her sorely. Long
This matter should to clearness have been brought.
And hadst not thou, good father, and Brigitta . . .

BENEDICT

Gottfried, bethink thee what thou didst of late,
And to what pitiful end the effort came!

GOTTFRIED

Ay. God have mercy. I know it well. If but
The child had been brought up a peasant lass,
She had not fallen prone upon the earth
What time I brought an honest suitor home.
Dear lord, why didst thou leave us? On that morn
When, as each day, she stepped unto thy bed,
Bearing the foaming milk and found thee not,
That morn the evil's rage did master her.
If thou returnest not with us this day
She'll pine away and die.

BENEDICT

Thou canst not bide
The winter in the forest. Behold, even I,
Inured to hardship, guarded by my cell
And by God's house, must flee at times and seek
The warm hearthstones of kindly men and be
In storm-proof walls, 'neath some protecting roof.

HENRY

Thou fool! Thou bald procurer and thou tool,
Grey headed fool! Get hence! What would ye here?
Figs from the thistle? Wine from prickly thorns?
Who am I — what? Where is my plenty, speak,
That I may share with beggars such as ye?

Thou seekest me, fool? Didst thou not creep
about,
What time I was still housed beneath thy roof,
Oppressed by wretched care? Didst thou not live
In constant terror of thy very serfs?
Did not thy glances and thy wife's betray
The horror and the wishes of your hearts?
Ye did it well, but your dumb looks still plead:
Go! Free us! Hie thee — that we breathe
again!

GOTTFRIED

By heaven, thou errest, lord!

HENRY

No error, nay!
Truly, your pity threw into my trough
Enough of chatter, empty words, deceit,
To drown the craven shame within your hearts.
That fare seemed well enough for a brief space
And then no more. I fled into the wild.
What life had left me of my inmost self
I gathered up and hurried to escape
My soul's monition. 'Twas a prince that fled.
There followed in the horror of that chase
The miserable soldier who still lives.
He cried out after me. He whined. He bade
Me buy the bodies of children for their blood . . .
My speech is clear; ye read its meaning well.
Go, get ye hence. Ye have understood . . . Ye
come . . .
Why do ye come? Whose helpers are ye, whose?
Why do ye stand there? Hear me! She came
. . . She came
On the third day. She found me for her soul
Is rich in presage. Yea, she came . . . was here.

I saw her and I swear by that high God
Who knows me not nor looks upon my pain:
Her coming was the devil's keenest thrust.
But I defied his guile! I laughed, I whistled
As though she were a tree at the wood's edge,
I did as though her eyes were not upon me,
Showed all my bareness and my misery, raged,
And kept her far with stones hurled round about.

BENEDICT

My dear lord, she would save thee. That's the cause
For which she sought thee in thy solitude.
And a strange rumor came to her. The man
Ottacker brought it first unto her ears —
That by a bloody cure thy sickness might
Be healed. There is a master in Salerno
Who dare assert that he can cleanse thine ill
If but a maiden pure and virginal
In willing faith yield her unto his knife.

HENRY

Do ye believe that?

GOTTFRIED

Nay, my lord, nay, not I.
But yielding by no hair's breadth, obstinate,
To that delusion clings the unhappy child.
Help us to snatch her from the devil's grasp.

BENEDICT

Too swift in judgment art thou. Who shall say
What things are compassed by God's power, what things
By Satan's guile. In her is sacred strife.
From out our narrow earth her soul yearns forth
To sacrificial death — mysteriously

Through the dark gate into eternal life!
Who knows unto whose weal?

GOTTFRIED

Unto no man's!
And to her own destruction, father, too.

BENEDICT

Nay; them who seek God, will He not desert.
Even in the pit of hell His loving eye
Will watch the sinner thirsting for redemption,
Although he lie by Satan's claws held fast.
Trust and be not undone by lack of faith.
True, she defies us all, struggles with God,
As though to wring from Him the martyr's crown.
'Tis true, yet — *gratia praeveniens* —
Who shall deny what visions teach her soul?
Blood is the expiation still of life.
Thus saith Leviticus. The selfsame law
Proclaims itself within her childish heart.

HENRY

Are those thy thoughts? And deemest thou them true?
She dreams, sees visions, thinks in the end that God
Is pleasured by steaming blood. Is to be cozened
Out of His usury for the debt of guilt
That festers in us? Ye are in error! Go!
She is deluded. Do ye hear? Besides,
From other days when still I pored on books,
Nor owned that silent wisdom of the soul
Which now is mine — I know that cure she dreams
Is naught but folly.— Go and tell her that . . .
Look ye: I am very calm. Deep, deep within
The abyss of folly — strangely enough — I grew
At one straight blow, cool to the very heart.

And what I say to ye is sane and cold
As thought it came from yonder icy brook
And were not wrung from this hot breast of mine:
Sinless am I. Tell her that I am free
Of guilt, utterly stainless, pure as snow,
And that the pestilence in my sick blood
Has never stained the vesture of my soul
Unto this moment. Say that no man on earth
Can cleanse pure linen, washing it in blood,
And he who yet attempts it — tell her — serves
The ancient snake of error, and not God.

BENEDICT

[*Shakes his head deprecatingly.*

To give that message were to ply the spur
Upon her soul athirst for sacrifice.
For she, as I, well knows those words of thine —
And this is truth — but deepen thy strange guilt.
Only a broken and a contrite heart,
Only humility can make thy peace.

HENRY

Mistrust humility, for still ye are
But arrogant of soul, and thy pride rides thee
Even like a shameless, insolent wench, when deep
Thou bowest down and writhest in the dust.
Who art thou that God should be mindful of thee,
Thou and thy pigmy's guilt ridiculous,
And thy mere worm's remorse? Or dost thou think
Aught thou hast done, is done without His will?
Behold: upon this cliff I often stand
And blaspheme loudly. Echo answers me
With jeer and curse, and our two voices drown
The bird-song and the rustle of the leaves
And thunder of the waters — and yet far

How far do we fall short of aught that counts
As sin before the infinite courts of God!

GOTTFRIED

Dear lord, speak thou thyself! Speak unto her!
One word of thine is bread unto her need,
And water to the fever of her thirst.
I know not how such magic came to thee
That binds her heart so closely unto thine.
She kisses the footprints of thy lonely walks,
Sleeps in thy chamber, and thy name alone
Loosens the desperate rigour of her limbs.
But if thy curse fall on that master's cure,
As mine does — come, and give her back to life,
And tell her that the leech's words are lies,
And that no science known of mortal thought
And . . .

HENRY

[*Vehemently.*

. . . that no mortal power can wash me clean,
And that the Moorish leech is but a cheat,
A heathen, lusting only for my gold,
Naught else . . . that all's delusion . . . that I am sick,
But have not waxed so cowardly or dazed
That any folly's snare can catch my soul
Or a child's fatal madness bring to me
Advantage. Yea, ah yea, I know . . . I know . . .
This and much more. Oh, I have told her this,
And much beside. Ay, stare at me! 'Tis true!
For she was with me here a second time.
Ay, and I saw her and I did not know
How to escape from such deep guiles of hell.
Thus I feigned madness, I threw stones, I spat,
And stretched out threateningly my scurfy hands,

And a great horror came upon me lest
I be not resolute and strong, but touch
And grasp her, draw her to me and defile
Her shoulders or her delicate throat wherein
Her little pulses beat . . . Go! I say, go!
'Tis over, over. Look ye, when she called
With tones so sweet that they unmanned me quite:
"Poor Henry, I would save thee, save thee . . . "
then
I cried aloud: "I am leprous! Stay afar!"
I stumbled, fell, and lay upon the earth,
How long, I know not. Ah, and when at last
I woke, she was still by me, near me! Here
Is where she sat, here where she stood, and spoke
And told me that there was a leech . . . a
leech . . .
And that — Christ save my soul — the sacrifice
Was pleasing unto Heaven, and that this world
Was not her habitation and her rest.
That she would die and that I must not close
The eternal gateway to her but fare forth
Unto Salerno with her at that hour.—
And when she had poured out her childish soul,
And with all sweet simplicity made clear
The accursed folly of the Arab's cure —
I knew not what to do. Away I leapt
O'er yonder rocks, o'er yonder brook and ran
And fled and stopped not till I failed for breath
Far . . . far away . . . broke down and fell once
more.
And that was well. Bethink ye, my good
friends —
And weigh my deed in that I fled from her.
Am I not blasted by the cruelest curse
And against every other fortified?

Driven from your world, free of command or law
That bind alike the beggar and the prince?
Am I more than that? Think, think! She came
to me,
Alone she came . . . and in my breast there
throbs
An exiled heart. God offered her to me.
I spared her; I spared Him the sin He gave.
Could man do more? 'Tis well. Away! Away!
Ye have heard my lamentations end this hour.
I am hungry and must feed this body of mine
Which still my coward soul drags to and fro.
Unto what purpose? To what goal? . . . God
knows . . .

BENEDICT

[*Deeply moved and after a long silence.*
Farewell, lord. Seek a shelter.
[*Softly and compassionately.*
There will come
A cruel winter. Seek a shelter.
[*To* GOTTFRIED.
Come!
Come, Gottfried.

GOTTFRIED

Seek a shelter!
[*Exeunt* BENEDICT *and* GOTTFRIED.

HENRY

They are gone.
Confusion! The ripples die away! Naught's
left.
Except a child. Earth shrivels to one mound,
And on that Golgotha there stands a child.
It beckons me? Oh, whither beckonest thou
Upon that slope of bone and skulls? I will

Resist that stroke! Where is my spade. A dream:
Once she lay here . . . And toward the south that was . . .
I know not what. World, dost thou beckon? God?
[*He begins to dig.*
I know not. Seek a shelter! Seek a shelter!

THE FOURTH ACT

The interior of BENEDICT'S *chapel in the forest. To the left the altar and the eternal lamp; to the right the entrance door. The background represents a side wall of the chapel in which a little door leads to* BENEDICT'S *cell. The walls are covered with little pictures, as well as waxen images of little feet and hands. The altar and crucifix are wreathed in autumn leaves.*

THE FIRST SCENE

Not far from the main door stand BENEDICT *and* BRIGITTA *speaking softly.* BRIGITTA *is about to go. She wears a shawl over her head and carries a basket on her arm.*

BENEDICT

They spread their lies abroad, Brigitta, yet
Who knows the truth that lurks within.

BRIGITTA

We must
Believe it, Benedict. The bondman old
Who never lies, scarce ever speaks, in truth,
Saw him with his own eyes and is prepared
To swear that truth upon the Holy Cross.

BENEDICT

'Tis very strange. He crept into the moat?

BRIGITTA

The old man saw him lying in the grass
Behind the garden close, watchful and still.
But he who saw him creep along the moat
Was Kunz, the goatherd.

BENEDICT

And the old man says
That he leaped up?

BRIGITTA

Ay, when the bondman called
He leaped and fled across the fields away.

BENEDICT

I cannot yet believe it, nay, nor grasp it.
For what could his desire be? Never yet
Did ye deny your hospitable door.
Why should he, wolf-like, prowl about the house?

BRIGITTA

I know it not, and there is none who knows.
Wild has he grown, men say, and almost turned
Into a beast. Thus rumour, also, that
He is desperate and to extremity brought.

BENEDICT

It cannot be! Consider. Can a man
So lose himself — that man an emperor's friend
And brother in arms? It was but late I met him
In rags, but proud as in his brightest days.
'Tis folly that now sees him on all sides
And scents his outcast presence on all paths.

BRIGITTA

[*Eagerly.*
Father, thou knowest our ancient watch-dog well.
When yesternight the bondmen lay in wait,

Holding the dog in leash, at the midnight hour,
The strange man came and rattled at the gate.
Straightway the serfs set free the hound, but he
Leaped not upon the prowler, ran, gave tongue,
Howling with joy, not rage, sped unto him,
And fawned in rapture at the stranger's feet.

BENEDICT

Let us nor trust nor fear. The child is well
Under God's watch here in mine hermitage,
And thus safe for a space. I credit not
Not yet, the rumours thou hast heard, Brigitta,
However poor Lord Henry's star may wane
In the great world, without.

BRIGITTA

Men even say,
In Constance, with great pomp and circumstance
They lowered him into his fathers' grave.

BENEDICT

Well may his fortune be in evil case,
His very name be blotted from the book
Of those who live — yet his heroic soul
Is fortified like some great seraph's shoulders
With double pinions, white and black of hue.
Do the white pinions, heavenward soaring, fail?
Yet will he rest upon the sable wings.
Fearless I saw him at the edge o' the world
Where the great gulfs would dizzy any soul
By mortal courage born . . . He dug his grave,
And, trust me, in that grave will lay him down,
Or ere he wander, thief-like, in the night . . .
But this is to be feared, that if the child
Dwell with you, set aflame by rumour strange,
And learning of the visitants that prowl

About your house and lands, she fall a prey
To snares set by wild robbers of the road.

BRIGITTA

Well, I will go! — Praised be our Saviour Christ!
The darkness falls. The way is far. Gottfried
Awaits me. For too long a space even now
I linger here. And so I may report
That bravelier she bears herself with thee . . .

BENEDICT

Ay! Hush! Speak softly lest she hear our words . . .
Thou sawest her. Oh, she fares well enow,
Still full of faith that he will come some day.
And thus she waits like the wise virgin, keeps
Her lamp well filled with oil and near at hand
Against his coming — as though it were our Lord's.
Her dream sustains her, and that dream must I
Daily support and nourish still with lies,
Since that strange time when first my pious fraud
Exorcised her convulsive, feverish ill.
Time will bring counsel. Let the long months pass
And slowly will the uproar in her soul
Sink into silence. Even though at last
She take the Eternal Bridegroom's holy veil.

BRIGITTA

Ah, let that come to pass as God decrees.
[*She weeps.*
If but our lord were dead.
[*Passionately she kisses* BENEDICT's *hand.*

BENEDICT

[*Deeply moved.*

Console thyself.
What else of comfort can I speak to thee,
But that a deep monition to my heart
Came in a mystic hour when the bush burned
With God — a knowledge, strong, unquenchable,
Or call it faith or vision, at the least,
That this child is the burning bush aflame
Of Horeb, unconsumed forevermore.

[*Crackling noises are heard from behind the small door in the wall.*

BRIGITTA

[*Frightened.*

What is it?

[*Thrusts her gently out.*

Naught! Into the open! Go!

THE SECOND SCENE

FATHER BENEDICT, *left alone, hearkens until the sound of* BRIGITTA'S *retreating footsteps has died away. Then he listens to the sounds that proceed from his cell, shakes his head disapprovingly, goes to the little door and knocks.*

BENEDICT

Child! Ottegebe!

OTTEGEBE

[*From within.*

I am coming, father!

[*Bearing a burning lamp, she issues from the door. The darkness has now fallen.*

BENEDICT

[*Taking the lamp from her.*

What doest thou, slighting my kind command?

OTTEGEBE

[*Softly, with an ecstatic expression upon her wax-like, spiritualised countenance.*

O Jesus, Mary and Joseph! All my soul
Is given to ye and all my heart. O Jesus,
Be thou my sword and shield in my last fray!
O Jesus, Mary, Joseph . . .

BENEDICT

Listen, child,
Be gentle and obedient, for thou art
Given me in trust. I must give my account
To God and to thy parents. Why dost thou ply
A second time the scourge upon this day?

OTTEGEBE

[*Trembling she kisses the hem of his sleeve.*

I know not, father.

BENEDICT

How? Thou knowest not?
And coverest thyself with bloody stripes?

OTTEGEBE

Father, it eases me.

BENEDICT

What?

OTTEGEBE

I can breathe
Under the torture of the lash.

BENEDICT

And thou
Canst not breathe freely save for that?

OTTEGEBE

[*Sighing.*

Ah, nay . . .

BENEDICT

Let us the sacrificial candles take
And light them. For thy mother brought them here.
And, having done that, let us pray, and thank
God for the food which is our evening meal
Which, likewise, thy good mother's hand provides.
Come!

OTTEGEBE

[*Stands quietly, her great, moist eyes upon the crucifix.*
Father . . .

BENEDICT

What?

OTTEGEBE

I am quite ready now.

BENEDICT

Ready, thou sayest?

OTTEGEBE

To suffer and to die.

BENEDICT

Let be and turn thy soul to other things,
To common earthly things. I give thee leave.
Thy need is great and thou must live to serve.
If thou wouldst aid thy God, then must thou keep
Thy body and life to give them for His sake
In His good time.

OTTEGEBE

Ay, father.

BENEDICT

Therefore take!

Come, take the food and also comfort thee
With thy good father's wine.

OTTEGEBE

[*Sits on the steps of the altar and gazes at the ceiling.*

Dost thou not think,
Father, that he will come unto me?

BENEDICT

Ay!
But he is no more where it was his wont.

OTTEGEBE

There where ye met him? Where he digged his grave?

BENEDICT

He is no longer there. The rumour runs
That he desired once more to see the world,
The steads and splendours of his mortal sins
Before his end.

OTTEGEBE

And yet he surely said
And firmly promised by his troth that he
Would come and seek thee out?

BENEDICT

Ay, that he did.
But noble lords are free of courteous speech.
Oh, thou dear, over-wakeful, dreading heart,
Have patience and take ease. Fasting and prayer
And vigil chill have chastened thee enow —
Thy tender body almost gleams i' the dark.
Pray Heaven for the patience and the peace
That help us wait in gentleness and awe.

OTTEGEBE

Father, on this day will he come.

BENEDICT

Thinkest thou?

OTTEGEBE

Ay.

BENEDICT

And whence thy faith in this?

OTTEGEBE

In the deep watches
Of the night, and twice upon this day I heard
A hollow sound as of a leper's rattle.
Hark! There! Again!

BENEDICT

Naught came unto mine ears.
Nay, child, if weightier reasons have not come,
Or surer signs to thee than that the wind
Played havoc with old shingles on the roof,
Trust not . . .

OTTEGEBE

But he will come upon this day!
I know it. For, behold, at midnight, I
Awoke as at the calling of loud voices,
That cried and spake: "Watch, for thy lord is near!"
Straightway I put a wreath upon my lamp,
Poured oil into it and went forth — ay, father —
And watched upon the threshold at the door.
And, as I sat there silent, all my soul
Turned in upon itself, scarcely aware
Of the wild storm, suddenly broke on me
A terror grim, a dread unspeakable.
Temptation is upon me, I thought, and all
My senses swooned in horror. Then the air
Was filled with crying unearthly, screaming, laughter,

Bellowing; and the wild breath of the wind
Was as of wolves — hot, fetid, and in gasps!
I sought to flee, to save myself, to find
Protection at thy breast and at thine altar:
And then . . . and then . . . I pressed both hands unto
My throbbing eyes — thus — and yet was aware,
And saw as clearly as I see thee now.
I saw myself, naked and shamed, a corse,
Dragged through the storm in triumph horrible
By shrilling demons with the heads of dogs;
A dagger, long and bare, was in my breast.
Father, thy hand! The memory makes me faint.
For, at that moment, hell laid hold on me.
A sinful stirring in my soul awoke,
As though I, too, must leap into the whirl,
Naked and shameless as the powers of hell.
And then the miracle: Through all the strife
And uproar — steadfast was my will and pure.
God looked on me and granted me his grace,
And with the breath of His great mercy blew
Night's spectral phantoms from the face of earth.
Then, silent, in that dim, mysterious hour,
Rising from southward and from northward, poured
As from a fountain, a radiant light and clear,
And from that light, in one strange minute, rose
Slowly two silent, alien suns that moved
Gradually higher, father, and higher still,
Till, in the zenith, they became as one.
Now a great purity fell over all —
In me, about me, upon heaven and earth.
And from those constellations o'er my head
The sweet, immortal Saviour issued forth.
And a vast music sounded as of choirs

Numberless and the song came: *Sursum corda! Gloria in excelsis Deo!* And last
A great and goodly voice sounded and sang:
"Amen, for thy beseeching hath been heard,
And broken is the burden of his doom!"

BENEDICT

Ay, surely. But I am ignorant and bound
By fetters to the earth. My prison-house
Opens no window to the eternal light.
I languish in darkness. Teach me! From the lips
Of babes and sucklings shall proceed His praise.

OTTEGEBE

[*Laughing as from a deep, inner blessedness.*
Deemest thou when he called me little saint
So long ago, he thought upon this hour?

BENEDICT

Scarcely, my child. But silence! We must not
Play with presumptuous thoughts, or press the crown
That beckons and that may be ours, with hands
Of blasphemous violence upon our heads.
Granted thou art called of God and on the path
Eternal. Yet in memory of our fall
Since Adam and the sinful clay that clings
Unto our nature, thou must still remain
Strong in humility and gentle care.
In years long past I told thy mother once
The story of a rider, vain and bold,
Ensnared and maddened by a human love.
I mean that he had hung his poor, blind soul
Upon God's creature, not on God Himself.
It was a woman . . . and it came to pass

That when in pride the lady turned from him,
He was a broken man and all the world
Dust unto him and ashes. Such self-will
Lives in thee too, to-day, and 'tis my fear
That thou from God Himself mayest turn thy face,
Even as I turned it from the world that day,
Were He to fail thee and not grant that prayer
Whereon thy yearning and thy soul are fixed.

OTTEGEBE

Nay, father, nay, I have the assurance . . . I . . .

BENEDICT

And dost thou dare to penetrate the plans
Of the Most High? Who may presume to know
Whether the man thrust from His sovran throne,
Be worthy of such grace? Count Conrad's men
Have formed a ring about him, closing in,
As though he were a bear or aurochs fierce.
God let that come to pass. The infidel leech
May be in league with the Satanic powers,
A huntsman of lost souls, a pirate driven
Upon the seas of hell — his bloody cure
Naught but a base imposture and accursed.
Also, perchance, our lord has fled from here.

[OTTEGEBE *swoons.*

Perhaps . . . perhaps . . . But naught is certain now.
What is it, child? Art thou acold? She bleeds.
Dear saint, when thou into thy kingdom comest,
Forget not me.

[*Carrying rather than leading her he conducts* OTTEGEBE *back into the cell.*

THE THIRD SCENE

The chapel is empty. The eternal lamp and a few candles burn. The sharp sound of a

leper's rattle is heard. Thereupon, shy as an evildoer, muffled beyond recognition in cowl and hood, Henry *enters. He carries his staff, his rattle and his begging-bag. He drags himself to the steps of the altar and breaks down upon them like one seeking protection and refuge. Desperately the disjointed words are wrung from his soul.*

Henry

Prayer! Ah, I cannot pray!
Lord, give me speech? Oh, why deny to me
The words with which a soul in pain may cry?
Tears grant me, give me tears, wherewith I may
Quench the flame's tongues, the venomous and keen,
In rubbish of a ruined, burned-out stead
Forevermore. Slay me! Oh, slay me swift!
With bitter guile thou luredst me forth, a false
Malevolent hunter, from the very marge
Of the deep, silent coolth of the broad lake,
Just as, in beaver fashion, I prepared
To dip into the dark and chilly depth
Where naught may burn. Quench, quench this fiery life,
The torment of light quench in the sable lap
Of darkness quite. Wake me no more. The sun
Tortures me with its poisoned archery.
Sleep, give me sleep! My bed is not a bed!
The snakes of the sun are coiling in my brain
At midnight! Save me from the awful glare!
Why sowest thou hate? Why hast thou spread abroad
Like hail upon the earth, children born blind
Who rend each others' flesh? Why nourish us
With the milk of lamentation? We endure

The torment of the sun-flames day by day
With no cool drop to ease us. God, forget . . .
Forget me truly! Think me nothing worth —
No stone for thy great structure stained with blood,
Built upon blood-soaked ground and held in place
By bloody mortar. Ghastly does it rise,
Full of the coiling horror of our lives.
Regard me not, O cruel Master. Thou
Canst lightly spare this grain of dust, this me.
Free me from the torture of the scheme of things —
An exile from thy thralldom and thy work!

THE FOURTH SCENE

BENEDICT

[*Re-enters, carrying a small lantern, sees the muffled figure, recoils in fright, and asks:*

What seekest thou here? Who art thou?

HENRY

Ask me not.

BENEDICT

What seekest thou here in the depth of night?

HENRY

That which I thought a moment since.

BENEDICT

And that?
What meant it?

HENRY

That man is a sieve, O monk,
Scattering what he grasps.

BENEDICT

Who art thou?

HENRY

Guess!

BENEDICT

I beg of thee, thou dark, mysterious wight!
This is a sanctuary consecrate,
And if thou seekest the All-merciful's grace,
Thou art welcome! But confide in me: Who art thou?

HENRY

Seek thou the knowledge in thy heart. I know not.

BENEDICT

Art thou not one of the outcasts of the fields?

HENRY

I am of the entombed and dead.

BENEDICT

[*Making the sign of the Cross.*
God grant
Unto all sleepless souls His gift of sleep.
But thou still seemest made of flesh and blood.

HENRY

Save me, O father, father, save me — thou!
Speak unto God, thy father and thy lord
That he redeem me from the rage of men!
Thou art His servant! Bid him to recall
The slavering pack of wolf-like men that lies,
Maddened with hunting and bloodthirstiness
Upon my track! When into wells did I
Pour venom? Or from the foulness in my blood
And a toad's spawn roll balls and sink them deep
In fountains whereof men the water drink?
When did I that? Help me! Oh hide me fast!
Conceal me for they are snarling at my heels!

The land is lurid with a thousand stakes.
Hide me, conceal me! Else I burn . . . I burn . . .
And lock the door! For I am innocent! Nay,
Open it not, but help me! Help me! Save!
Their hatred is upon me! Ay, I crept,
Thus with my rattle and cowl into the world,
My bare feet on sharp knives. At every step
The blow of some lash seared my naked face.
I would be healed, O monk, I would be healed!
Do thou but heal me! Rid my tortured blood
Of pestilence and curse! I'll bury thee
To the very throat in heaps of ruddy gold —
For I am rich! Cleanse me and silence straight
The voice that cries "unclean, unclean," forever
With unendurable din. I'll throw to thee
All my possessions — castle, field and stead —
And cities, like a handful of base sand.
Speak to thy God, thy Father and thy Lord!
Tell Him He has beaten me like unto grain,
Tortured and ground in dust. Say that He has
Wreaked utterly His power upon my soul,
Wherein naught's left to grind or break in two.
Say that unto Him, monk: Say that I am rent
In sunder, my body's husk is foul, a dog —
A famished cur would void its loathliness . . .
And God, our Lord is great, mighty and great!
I praise Him, praise Him. There is naught but He —
And I am nothing! But I would live . . . would live!

[*He falls moaning at* Benedict's *feet.*

Benedict

Art thou indeed Lord Henry of Auë?

HENRY

Nay,
I am not he. Look ye: They buried him.
Behold! Use thine own vision! Does he live?
[*He drops the cowl and reveals his pale, starved, grief-distorted face.*

BENEDICT

[*Recoils in horror.*
Dear lord, is it thou in truth?

HENRY

Ay, tell me that.
Gaze straight into mine eyes and search it out.
For though I am naught but some strange, errant thing
That, driven about, in endless torment dwells,
There lurks a prating something in my brain
That through my madness boasts: I was a prince
Once, and among the great of this proud world.
Who am I? Rede the riddle! I was entombed
Of late at Constance, in my fathers' grave.
And yet I live! Or do I dream i' the earth?
What think'st thou? Do I live? Or do I dream
That I was buried to the sound of chimes,
And stood beside what time they carried by,
With all the insignia of princely power,
My coffin? And was it a dream that then
From a torch carried by a torchbearer
A flake of fire flew down and singed my foot?
And that I heard my Cousin Conrad say,
As with a jeer he stepped into the church:
"'Twill show if swine like this can burst the tomb!"
Tell me: Is this the selfsame Conrad — this —
Who now prepared my coffin and my grave

And whom in other days, in heathenesse
I freed from slavery with bars of gold?
And am I he that did that deed, or else
This wretched, ragged mass of poverty,
Who, if a cabbage rises in the field
With semblance of a human countenance,
Trembles and shakes and creeps seven acres wide
Out of his way, through pool and fen and thorn,
Lest he behold the Gorgon's fatal stare?

BENEDICT

Once in an hour when a serene and clear
Spirit was in thee, thou didst say to me:
Philosophy and faith — these were thy words —
Have one deep, common purpose. And 'tis this:
To arm our souls with equanimity;
One doctrine, that we sink our fretting wills
Utterly in God's will.

HENRY

[*Suddenly changed.*
Not that . . . no more!
No more! Where is the child?

BENEDICT

[*Frightened.*
What child?

HENRY

The maid!
The simple girl! My farmer Gottfried's daughter!

BENEDICT

But why? What is it? What would you with the child?

HENRY

Ah! What I would? What wouldst thou with that question?

BENEDICT

I would search out a Christian's thought and aim!

HENRY

Is thy God merciful?

BENEDICT

Ay!

HENRY

And can he save me?

BENEDICT

Ay.

HENRY

Speak: Can he then save me through the child?
But no more words! Where is she?

BENEDICT

Why? . . . Thou art
A nobleman, dear lord!

HENRY

And thou a villain!

BENEDICT

Meanest thou that poor, unblessed, wandering child
That sought its Godward path through the great dark
And, well-nigh lost, hovers o'er the abyss?

HENRY

Errant or not: Is she with thee?

BENEDICT

No.

HENRY

No?
Monk, hear my words! Look deep into mine eyes
And steadily, so that thou weighest well
Each single word ere that thou utterest it.
There is a warning, graven with fiery thorns
In blood-stained letters on my countenance!
Heed well its meaning or thy sands are run,
And thou art hurled into perdition straight.

BENEDICT

My lord, those strange, wild threats affright me not
Though thou art strange and terrible and the flare
Of the abyss flash through the sanctuary.
But the Almighty Father guards His children . . .

HENRY

Naught will protect thee, no one, if thou liest.
Where is she? She is here! Three nights I crept
In the great darkness about Gottfried's house
And could not find my spouse, howe'er I sought,
Although I lay and listened at the gate,
And, spying and wretched, crawled my way about
Through thorn and hedge — even like a noble lord!
She is with thee! A serf betrayed it who
Slapping his mare's side in the stable spoke:
"Be gentle, else, like to the farmer's child,
I'll send thee a-wooing with a hooded monk."

BENEDICT

But, my dear lord . . . wilt thou not tell me this:
Why, like a thief, crawlest thou through the night?
What wouldst thou do with the child Ottegebe?

HENRY

I'd have her to play tricks withal at court,
And earn three farthings from the emperor.
That was my purpose, monk! What is it to thee?

BENEDICT

Did not thyself instruct me on that day . . . ?

HENRY

Who am I to instruct another soul?
Repay me now! Instruct me where she is!

BENEDICT

Not here! Not with me!

HENRY

Nay? Where is she then?

BENEDICT

With God.

HENRY

Where sayest thou?

BENEDICT

In God's hands.

HENRY

She is with God! What meanest thou? Is she dead?

BENEDICT

They who are with God live!

HENRY

Then she has died.

BENEDICT

To this world only, as the bride of Heaven.

HENRY

'Tis well. I knew it. Oh, I might have known!
Pull tight the noose, monk! It is enough . . .
enough . . .
[*Exhausted and brokenly.*
For the last time, O monk! Look ye, this day
Has taught me, no man is so poor but God
Can make him poorer still. What robber took
Ever from one who had naught all he had?
'Tis well. 'Tis well. The child is dead . . . is
dead.
Is gone. When came a livid Lazarus
And brought this news to me and told me how
Her heart was broken for her sick lord's sake,
Then with the might of madness I repressed
The awful cry that struggled in my heart
To silence and believed not. Then my feet
Flew! Whither? I knew it not. Through field
and fen,
Through thorns and bushes, up hill and down
dale,
Through the wild torrent of the swollen brooks,
Until I stood on life's last threshold here.
Why did I run? What golden prize allured
So that I leaped and, like a runner, sped?
What thought I here to find? Ah, was it not
As though a whirling fire tore me on?
As though I were myself a flaring torch
That, crying and burning, through the forest
drives?
I thought . . . The air rang o'er me . . . she is
not dead!
She lives! She lives! Thy little spouse still
lives!
And yet . . . and yet . . . she died.

THE FIFTH SCENE

OTTEGEBE

[*Appears at the door of the cell. Scarce audibly she breathes the words:*

Nay, lord, she lives.

HENRY

[*Without seeing or recognising her; in the same manner.*

Who spoke?

OTTEGEBE

'Twas I!

HENRY

Who?

BENEDICT

[*Softly but vehemently.*

Go! What wouldst thou here?

HENRY

Who spoke those words?

BENEDICT

I heard none spoken.

OTTEGEBE

I.

HENRY

Thou? Who? Once more! Who spoke those words? Who spoke?

OTTEGEBE

I, Ottegebe and thy little spouse.

HENRY

[*Falls silent in his boundless consternation. Thereupon:*

Who? — Unclean! Unclean! — Stay! Ah, do not speak!

Truly I think that thou art but a shade,
Nay, know it. But no mortal man can know
Whether the abysmal poison in my blood
Will spare even blessèd ghosts. Oh, come not near!
But stay! Thou art not mortal — that I know,
But thou canst die — to me. And oh, I would
That in the mirror of my breaking eyes
Thine image be the last. Ah no, thou art not,
Not Ottegebe! 'Tis true thy forehead is
Pure as hers, high, marmoreal, yet art thou
Not made of dust. Oh, in thy voice there thrills
A sweetness as familiar to my soul
As my dead mother's crooning lullabies.
Yet art thou not that little peasant maid,
And not my little spouse — didst never sit
Low at my feet and with thy long, bright hair
Dry these deep wounds of mine! Speak! Speak at last!
For wert thou she, how could I grasp the light
Breaking my blessed prison's riven walls?
If thou art she, mine eyes were always blind,
And only in these deeps found sight at last;
And I should no more curse but bless and thank
And not accuse the power that led me on.
And if once more I stood on high, upon
My throne of other days, with nail and tooth
I'd dig the stairs leading to this abyss
Whereto the not-Almighty hurled me down
With his resistless hand. Thou art not she! . . .
Salve regina! . . . God be merciful!

[*He breaks down. His moans are lost in sobs and his soul finds the liberation of tears.*

OTTEGEBE

[*Appears in the strange dimness of the chapel almost disembodied and radiantly transfigured. She approaches* HENRY, *rests on one knee, raises his head with her hands and kisses his forehead. He stares at her, obedient as a child in all his gestures . . . as though he saw a heavenly vision.* BENEDICT, *too, has yielded to the enchantment of the moment and kneels.*

Come, for the hour hath grown so late, poor Henry!

HENRY

Salve regina!

OTTEGEBE

Come!

BENEDICT

Whither goest thou?

OTTEGEBE

Upon my heavenly birthday to be glad.

BENEDICT

Under the knife of the Salernian leech?

OTTEGEBE

Thanks, father Benedict! Remember me!

BENEDICT

How shall I answer thy poor father's eyes?

OTTEGEBE

My father is in Heaven and I shall
Be with my father sooner far than thou . . .

BENEDICT

[*To* HENRY.

Where will ye fare?

HENRY

Ask her; I know it not!

OTTEGEBE

Oh come, poor Henry! Haste! Do not delay.
And, father, wouldst thou bind me unto earth
With heavy ropes? And wilt thou rob me of
The offering of that mite which is my blood,
Wherewith I gain me an eternal crown?

HENRY

Maiden, thou art mine . . .

OTTEGEBE

I am God's, God's only. Nay.
What words are thine? Ah, woe is me!

HENRY

For God
Has meted out to me just so much life
As thy dear, sacred hand can draw for me.

OTTEGEBE

From the deep well of grace I'll draw thee life.
But in no mortal world. Come, come, 'tis all
Decreed by God. I must and will and must.
And human words can hinder nor delay.
Saint Agnes, too . . .

BENEDICT

Art thou the Bride of God?
Then at this hour and in this garb will I
Conduct thee to a cloister. Ay, in the twinkling . . .

OTTEGEBE

Nay, father.

HENRY

Maiden, I will follow thee.
Lead me to life, or lead me else to death —
Unto Saint Lawrence's grate of searing fire,
Unto the stake of Polycarp! I will
Despise all torment if but at thy side
And with my blood bear witness to thy truth.

THE FIFTH ACT

A hall in the castle of Auë. Through a door in the background an adjoining chapel and its altar are visible. Standards of the house of Auë, banners of the crusade and other relics are hung up in the chapel. To the right of the chapel and adjoining it an Italian loggia. On the left side of the hall a richly decked throne, approachable by several steps, stands under a canopy. It is a radiant-morning late in Spring.

THE FIRST SCENE

HARTMANN VON AUË *in rich attire.* FATHER BENEDICT *and* OTTACKER. *The latter fully armed as before.*

BENEDICT

[*In close conversation with* HARTMANN, *while* OTTACKER *stands respectfully at one side.*

'Tis said by men that at Aix la Chapelle,
Thrust by a knight, while tilting, through the helmet,
He fell . . .

OTTACKER

And bit the dust.

HARTMANN

And were that true
Thou sayest, father — and the selfsame news

Came unto me of the Lord Conrad's fall —
Then as a pious servant of my lord,
God's ways as doubly wondrous I declare.
For now — thou knowest by what hairbreadth 'scapes
I held the castle for its ancient lord —
Even now a wind from somewhere blew to me
This writing in his manful hand of old.

BENEDICT

From Italy?

OTTACKER

Nay, I know the bearer well —
A charcoal burner from a neighbouring vale.

HARTMANN

And didst thou closely question him?

OTTACKER

I did,
Besetting him by all means possible;
But the defiant, sullen, headstrong knave
Was silent as his charcoal in the woods.

BENEDICT

Think'st thou that he is in a valley near?

OTTACKER

God strike me dead if he be not!

HARTMANN

He is!
Where else? And who had writ these words but he?
Behold the message! Much is dark therein,
But so much may be clearly learned indeed
That even this day, perchance, he'll be with us.

BENEDICT

Look ye, my letter — in the Latin tongue —
Was sent from Venice.

OTTACKER

By Saint Ann, to me,
It seems, he writeth never a word at all.

HARTMANN

What were his words to thee?

BENEDICT

They were not clear:
Almost I had angered him upon that tide . . .
But he would pardon me in Christian wise . . .

OTTACKER

May God give absolution to us all.

BENEDICT

If I but show myself obedient now,
And early on the morn of Saint John's day
Prepare the chapel in his castle here.

HARTMANN

[*In the serenity of a happy presentiment.*
Then, being here, thou canst obey him straight.
And take this key — for thanks to Heaven above
And thirteen hundred knights and men-at-arms —
I hold it still upon its ancient ring.
Take it and go into the treasure chamber
Whereafter mightily Count Conrad's mouth
Watered in greed unquenchable, and bring
The golden chalice of the mass that served
Once under Karl the Great.

BENEDICT

[*Takes the key.*
At thy command.—
And thinkest thou that he is cured indeed?

HARTMANN

That, Father Benedict, I know not yet.

BENEDICT

And did the rumour come unto thine ears,
That the miraculous leech did cleanse his blood?

HARTMANN

That rumour came and others. Twenty times
'Twas said that he had died — in Florence once,
Or else at Padua or Ravenna — lay
At Monte Casino dead, was drowned, or stabbed,
Or into Etna's crater hurled himself.
And yet an hundred other rumours came:
Or that an Angel's kiss had made him pure,
Or that the bath at Pozuolli had cleansed him,
Or the Salernian master healed his ill.

BENEDICT

And what shall one believe of all? Or do?

HARTMANN

But one thing — this: Be faithful unto death!

BENEDICT

And Ottegebe?

HARTMANN

Father Benedict!
If that our lord be well, then will I say
That Heaven unto his weal had called this saint
To life, that he might live and that her death
Was the decree of the Most High!

BENEDICT

Perhaps!
Yet 'tis a bitter thing to see him here:
Bethink thee, what I have seen, Sir knight, and what
Experienced, since the child escaped from us!
We sought her, Gottfried and Brigitta and I
From place to place, city to city, sought
In hospitals, or where vice is at one
With misery — such things sink deep, sink deep.
Moreover — were I free of any guilt —
But a remorse as cruel as a snake
Nests in my bosom and coils and gnaws and gnaws.

HARTMANN

Thou knewest the maiden from her childish days?

BENEDICT

As though she were my daughter, mine own child!
Ah, had I held her all mine own to be,
And been a father to her in all truth!
Thus have I proved a hireling and no shepherd!

HARTMANN

And shall I tell thee all my thought? It was
Dame Venus stirred this village maiden's heart.

BENEDICT

The earthly love it was; thou speakest truth.
It was that hopeless love which can endure
All things, and suffer all things to the end.
I know who once went on that selfsame path,
But by a heavenly radiance perplexed,
Discerned it not — blind once more in mine age.

HARTMANN

Thou judgest harshly, Father Benedict.
To me even now the child doth seem a saint.

The heavenly seeming is the heavenly truth:
Heavenly and earthly love are but one love.

BENEDICT

The wisdom of this world! Oh, that I had
Found greater store of it in hours of trial.

HARTMANN

It was for Henry's sake that death seemed sweet
Unto her. Oh, I have mused upon her fate.
In death her love its triumph found at last,
And 'twas through death her love at last could speak.

BENEDICT

If that the child has given her life for love,
It were a gracious miracle indeed,
Healing, consoling, unto all our hearts.
But I have lost that faith. Nay, that dear pearl
Was quenched for aye in some foul wayside pool.
May God forgive our master — never me!

HARTMANN

[*To* OTTACKER, *who makes a gesture as if to withdraw.*

Whither away, Ottacker?

[OTTACKER *betrays the impatience of one kept against his will.*

Well, what is it?

[*To* BENEDICT.

Surely thou knowest this valiant man-at-arms?

BENEDICT

Nay.

HARTMANN

He is full of stories quaint and old,
Which he will tell not only in the barns

To maids and men, but oftimes in the rooms
Of children.

OTTACKER

Strike me dead, my lord! But I
Scarce know what meaning these same words may hold.

HARTMANN

He curses so that heaven itself will fall,
Swears that the very toads hop — dost thou not? —
That he had never told the farmer's child
The perilous tale of the Salernian leech.

BENEDICT

Art thou the man?

OTTACKER

What man? What's wanted? What?
The devil take me! Nay, I will not curse.
Let me but mount my bulwark peaceably!
[OTTACKER *exit.*

THE SECOND SCENE

HARTMANN

That was the man!

BENEDICT

The man who left our lord?

HARTMANN

And filled the child with strange and dangerous thought!
His own skull is a nest of serpents' eggs
Whereof the fevered ardour of his body
Breeds momently the wriggling fruit. He drags,
Fired by devotion, wood unto the stakes
Of Jews and lepers; is covered, head to foot,
With amulets — dreams of the screech-owl, carries

Thieves' fingers and a vial of human blood
Always upon him, swears the truth of all
That's ghastly, strange, beyond the ken of man.

BENEDICT

The world is full of demons! Let him be!
But faithlessness is shame.

HARTMANN

And yet this man
Who once, a craven, did desert our lord,
But lately threw himself, from a tower's height,
Upon the enemies of this very lord,
A thunderbolt defying death and doom.

THE THIRD SCENE

OTTACKER

[*Rushes in boisterously.*
Satan himself cut out my tongue! My lord,
Give me my leave!

HARTMANN

Where wilt thou go?

OTTACKER

Away!
Down in the courtyard stands a poor old man
And with him, God forgive me, an old woman . . .
The devil! To heathen lands I'll hie me first.

HARTMANN

[*Looking through the window.*
Gottfried! Brigitta! Father, by my troth,
There are our old friends from the forest come.
[OTTACKER *exit.*

THE FOURTH SCENE

BENEDICT

Are these things clear to thee?

HARTMANN

Not fully. Yet
No evil presage do I see therein.
Think of thine altar. If all signs speak true,
And most this last of all, then doth our lord
With ancient wisdom steer our helm again.
It was a goodly saint began this day,
And to his keeping, under God, we'll leave it.

THE FIFTH SCENE

[*A monk who holds his cowl over his face with his left hand and carries his pilgrim's staff in his right, appears suddenly and strides across the hall.*

HARTMANN

[*Is astonished and crosses the path of the strange monk.*
Whither away? How didst thou pass the guards?
[*The monk indicates by a gesture that he would be alone with* HARTMANN.
Go! He brings news, 'twould seem, for me alone.
[*Exit* BENEDICT.

HARTMANN

[*Drawing his sword.*
Now speak!

THE STRANGE MONK

Hartmann!

HARTMANN

Henry! Merciful God!
[HENRY *and* HARTMANN *embrace each other silently.*

HENRY

God spake to me: Go, show thee to the priests!

HARTMANN

And art thou healed? And . . .

HENRY

The child? Send to the forest
And let my little spouse herself give answer.

HARTMANN

Ah, by the living God! So the child lives?

HENRY

Deem'st thou I would be here if she were dead?

HARTMANN

[*With decision.*

Nay, lord!

HENRY

Nay, Hartmann!

[*They embrace once more.*

We will let it be!
How all things else have come to pass till I
Stand here and with sound feet once more can tread
This ancient rock, this noble cliff whereon
The castle of my fathers stands — thereof,
As of all things I learned, experienced, proved,
Lived through and suffered, be there silence still
Unto a fitter time! O my good Hartmann,
Have patience!

HARTMANN

Knowest thou that thy cousin Conrad
Lies wounded at Aix la Chapelle, sore hurt
In jousting?

HENRY

Ay, he fell from his horse, hurled prone
By no one but his beast and died a death

Devoid of honour. Thus the Angels shake
The changing dice i' the cup. Let be, my friend!
Haste we unto the day's more pressing tasks.
Where is the valiant Father Benedict?

HARTMANN

Gone to bring forth the chalice from the vault.

HENRY

Tell him to hasten in that office sweet,
And plunder me the myrtles of the grove,
For I would celebrate my wedding day
Straight. No delay must be. And let the warder
Bind me a simple wreath just large enough
To grace the head of a young peasant maid.

HARTMANN

What sayest thou?

HENRY

Naught, friend, but these clear words!
For what I have determined may not be
Defended in the sight of man. It is
Even as it is. Let that suffice thy heart.

When that first radiant beam of heavenly grace
Struck me and a dear saint came to my need,
Then was I cleansed! All the unworthy fled
From the accursèd, murky, blasphemous heart;
The icy breath that froze my perishing soul
Melted; and hate and vengeance and all rage
And terror — and the mad desire to cleave
To men albeit at the cost of blood
Died in me. But I was helpless. Thus I clung
Half-conscious to my mediator and blind
I followed, without asking, in her steps.
Within the lustre of her aureole,

In her sweet fragrance I could breathe again,
And sleep, that long had shunned me — when her hand
Laid its cool pressure on my aching head —
Warded the demons from my fevered heart.
[Father Benedict *appears.*
Thee do I seek — thee, above all, good father!
Help me, for I am clean and pure and sound
And at the goal — and still so far from it.
Speak not, not yet, but hear me, for once more
The radiance of heaven's grace did cleave my soul.

How shall I speak? Oh, in that radiance new
That quivered from the child's long eye-lashes —
She lives! Look not so pallid, dear old friend —
Was born anew the spirit of my love
Into the darkness of a dying world.
In the suffusion of this brightness joy
Illumined the old hills from peak to peak,
In rapture rolled the sea, the deeps of heaven
Beckoned in bliss — and in my sluggish blood
Began a happy stirring, the new strength
Of re-arisen powers. And these did blend
Into a mighty will, a force, a power
That visibly against my sickness fought.
It was a cleansing strife. Unhealed was I.
But this I knew: I must be healed or else
Suffer with her dear self an equal death.
Dear friends, she drew me to Salerno on,
Against my urging, against my beseeching.
I strove to break her vow and the same vow
Conquered my strength.— True, in the Paradise
Of the clear South her feet would loiter oft.
In the deep emerald of the Apennine
She stood, dazed by the splendour, or on shore

Of the reverberant sea, pallid with pain
And bliss. . . . And in such hours she seemed to me
An ardent angel rising from the earth.
But ever, after such lone hours, she fled
The world, seized doubly by the lust of death,
And drew me swifter, swifter, southward on!

We stood before the leech. In spite of all
Words and all prayers, stood in Salerno . . . ay.
He spake to her. He asked her: What she would?
Die for me, answered she. He marvelled, showed
The knife, the rack, the cruel implements.
Ten times he counselled her: Desist! His words
Moved not the iron of her purpose. Then
He locked her with him in that place of blood.
But I — I know not how it came to pass —
I heard a roaring as of waters, light
Flashed, and with swords of torment clave my heart.
Naught saw I, but the door's sharp splinters flew;
The blood dripped from my hands, and straight I strode,
Or seemed to stride, clean through the wall of stone.
And there she lay, O friends, before me — lay
Naked as Eve — tied fast unto the wood.
Then came the third stroke of Heaven's grace to me;
Then came the miracle — for I was healed.
O Hartmann, like a soulless husk of flesh,
An evil wizard's creature of dead slime,
And not God's child — fashioned of stone or brass —
Such art thou till the pure, ethereal stream

Of the divine has poured its living fire
Into the hull mysterious which hides
The miracle of being from our ken.
Then art thou thrilled with life. Unfettered, free,
The immortal light fills full thy mortal breast,
Radiantly breaking through thy prison's walls,
Redeeming, melting thee and all thy world
In the eternal universe of love.
Go, lead her hither!

[*Exit* Hartmann.

Father, she is here.
But no more wilt thou find the little maid
Thou knewest of old. For in the very hour
In which I freed her from the master's rack,
And bore away the trembling gift of heaven —
In that same hour her lovely spirit broke.
First, through long weeks, a fever tortured her.
Then, re-arising from that bed she seemed
Changed utterly. Although her feet could scarce
Support her, she would never mount upon
The horse that was to serve her journey's need.
Though heavy as lead her limbs, yet at my side
In pain she ran, seeming to flee my face,
And but with horror she endures my sight.

Benedict

Where is she? Take me to her! Lord, forgive:
My tongue is very heavy in this hour
Of gratitude. She comes! Leave her to me.

[Henry *withdraws into the chapel.*

THE SIXTH SCENE

[Ottegebe *is led in by* Hartmann. *She is pale and worn. Her feet are bare. She supports herself with a staff.*

OTTEGEBE

[*Looking about her in unspeakable astonishment.*

Where am I, lord?

HARTMANN

In Auë's castle.

OTTEGEBE

Where?

HARTMANN

In Auë's castle.

OTTEGEBE

Where and in what land?

HARTMANN

In the Black Forest, lady, and at home!

BENEDICT

Look upon me! Hast thou forgotten me?

OTTEGEBE

[*Brooding obstinately.*

Tarry a little.

[*Throws herself with fearful joy upon his breast.*

Father Benedict!

Tell no one, no one, father, who I am!
Help me! Be true! Be good! Be merciful,
Lest the unspeakable shame consume me quite!

BENEDICT

Gently, dear child, ah gently. I will hide thee,
If thou art safe nor hidden otherwhere . . .

OTTEGEBE

Yea, here with thee . . . here in thy quiet cell.

BENEDICT

Ah!

OTTEGEBE

Here with thee, deep hidden in the woods . . .

BENEDICT

Come to thy senses, thou dear wayworn child.
Thou errest. The birds are twittering in the vales,
And hall and chamber in the castle here
Re-echo. In the forest we are not.

OTTEGEBE

I cannot well remember where we are!
Come deeper into the mountains . . . deeper still!
Hear me . . . Nay, later! Come! Not here!
Not here!
I lied! I am damned! I am an outcast!
Oh . . .

BENEDICT

Thy deed bears witness for thee, thou dear maid.
Ready wert thou to give thy life away
In expiation, at Poor Henry's need.
But from the altar, as once Isaac, so
God took thee in His everlasting arms.

OTTEGEBE

I died, died on the altar, was consumed
By a hard, wild, strange and resistless fire
Aflame deep in the marrow of my bones.
I strove to cry: O demons, set me free!
But on my throbbing lips did the sound die.
"Thrust deep or ere I perish, evil leech,"
I moaned. In vain. My thirsty lips sucked in,
Panting, the poison of the enemy.
And ere the angels their hosannas sang,
Died all my yearning upon Satan's breast.

BENEDICT

[*Supporting her while she speaks and leading her toward the throne.*

What words may bring thee comfort? For, behold,
Thou knowest me, knowest that in all the world
There's naught so dear unto my soul as thou.
Take then to heart thine old confessor's words:
Well may the leech be of the evil one.
But for that very cause did our lord's strength
Arise to save thee in the hour of doom.
And thus thou layest in no demon's arms
But on his breast whose soul thou strovest for
In sacred ardour — who now strives for thee.

OTTEGEBE

[*Sinking upon the throne in deep exhaustion.*

I lied . . . lied! Oh, I strove not for his soul!
And therefore in the pillory God set me.

[*She hides her face in her hands.*

HENRY

[*Comes softly from the chapel and kneels before her.*

Oh, look about thee! Tremble not! Thou art
No cagèd dove and not a serpent I
That thou needest quiver and hide thee from my glance
Yet art thou mine, and all the man in me
Thy very own. I am no tempter; nay,
But sorely tempted, like unto thyself.
And though thou art freer from all earthly dross,
Yet hath the fire so purified me too
That I, a ring of thrice-cleansed metal, may
Surround the diamond of utter glow
Which is the image of thy blameless soul.

And so, O little spouse, speak but one word,
Softly in answer to my question soft.
Then mayest thou rest thee from the weary cares
Of our long morning which now melts into
The calm of perfect day. Didst thou not strive
To give my lost life back to me and spend
Thine own therefor? Give me thy life indeed,
Which yet is mine from all eternity!
O thou, mine handmaid, faithful unto death:
Let my command find thee once more to-day,
For the last time, obedient to its call:
'Tis this — be thou my lady henceforth, be
My wife!

[Ottegebe *has opened her eyes wide in ecstasy. Then, as though dazed by a great light, she slowly closes them.*

Benedict

In storms of light she fell asleep,
But saw the utter glory ere she slept.

Henry

[*Springing up. With deep determination.*
An earthly wedding or eternal death!

THE SEVENTH SCENE

[Ottacker *has appeared in the doorway. He recognises* Henry, *takes a few steps toward him and sinks upon his knees.*

Henry

O Ottacker, thou faithless faithful one!
Arise! No man but needs forgiveness.
Thou strovest still and still I marked that strife.
And they who strive are they who live albeit
Erring. Tireless to strive is still to be

Upon a goodly road. And as a sign
Of ancient trust and friendship here renewed,
Shalt thou, the while I don my purple, be
Beside my throne the warder of the grail.

[Henry *and* Hartmann *exeunt.*

THE EIGHTH SCENE

Benedict

Rest! Rest!

Ottacker

[*Stationed beside the throne.*

And though she slept a thousand years,
O monk, if I depart a hair's breadth hence,
Though death, the ancient enemy, o'ercame me,
Thrust me into damnation without end!

THE NINTH SCENE

[Benedict *has gone into the chapel where he is seen busy at the altar. Gradually the hall is filled with knights, armoured and unarmoured.*

First Knight

Where?

Second Knight

Yonder?

First Knight

Where, knight?

Second Knight

Yonder on the throne.

Ottacker

Gently, my masters!

First Knight

Is it an image there?

THIRD KNIGHT

It is the maiden, masters, by my troth,
Whom lately from the window of the hall
I saw incline her o'er the gateside spring
And quench her thirst, drinking from hollow hands.

FIRST KNIGHT

Is it the spirit of Faery?

OTTACKER

Silence, Sir knight.
For sacred in the slumber of a saint.
Moreover she is now our lady.

FOURTH KNIGHT

What?

[*General and hearty laughter among the knights.*

FIFTH KNIGHT

What says the madman and the seer of ghosts?
She is a poor wayfaring maid — no more!

OTTACKER

May maggots seize upon ye. . . . May thine eyes
Darken, Sir knight! . . . She lives! Praise God, she lives!

FIRST KNIGHT

Ay, to be sure she lives, for her lips moved.

OTTEGEBE

Oh, never heard I such a storm of songs!

SECOND KNIGHT

She dreams.

OTTEGEBE

O father, hearest thou not the songs?

First Knight

What says she?

Ottegebe

Mother, mother, seest thou not?

First Knight

What would she?

Ottegebe

Look! A crown descends from high . . .
And it is borne by many, many hands . . .

Third Knight

Maiden, who art thou?

Ottegebe

[*In her sleep.*
I am your lady now!

First Knight

Dear maiden, whosoever thou mayest be,
Gladly before thy loveliness I bow.
But our poor Count of Auë is afar,
Wandering through the world's waste and unwed.
[*Astonishment and increasing excitement among the knights.*

Benedict

[*Issuing from the chapel, mysteriously.*
Silence and peace, my lords. This miracle
Has been led hither by a hand that is
Not to be crossed by any human will;
And this throne's canopy did never guard
Lady more purely noble than to-day.
Bow down! She is your mistress and must be.
Henry of Auë, our lost, forgotten prince,
No more forgotten, dwells among us now,
Healed to the very marrow, and will soon
Appear among us as our stay and lord!

THE TENTH SCENE

[*The knights break out into cries of acclaim and jubilation.* HENRY, *accompanied by* HARTMANN, *enters, clad in purple, bearing his sword. He is preceded by three pages, the first of whom bears two crowns upon a cushion.*

HENRY

I thank ye and salute ye in old love
From an arisen soul. Beneath this garb
Of purple, deep the scars and precious more
Than any purple. Ay, I grasped at truth
In all her many shapes and what I grasped
Cut runes into my flesh. Whatever seethes
I' the world of terror, shame, and blood-stained foam,
I know it now . . . I saw it. And I writhed,
Even I, in the black pools of damnèd souls,
Until the Love Divine that seeks us all
Found me at last.

[*He turns to* OTTEGEBE.

Dear saint! Dove, void of gall!
Give place! . . . Wake up, O spouse! Give unto me
The crown!

[*He takes a crown and holds it over* OTTEGEBE'S *head.*

Truly this maiden was to me
A mediator. Without such an one
God can redeem us not. Let that suffice.

[*He crowns her.*

And thus I ask ye — for in slumber God
Crowns his own chosen — will ye honour her
Now as your lady, more than me, and bow

Beneath the mild compulsion of her rule?
And will ye ring for us the wedding chimes?

HARTMANN

Dear lord, what sayest thou? Not the chimes alone!
Nay, we will strike upon our brazen shields,
Until this ancient castle's windows cry
Like throats our gladness over the valleys forth!
[*Renewed and mighty acclamation.*

HENRY

[*His eyes briefly shadowed.*
Silence! No tumult! Not this shrill delight
That deafens and awakens not, but more
Saddens and desecrates the soul of joy.
'Tis cowardice desires the brazen blare
Of trumpets. Cowards are we not, but men
Knowing both good and evil. It is well
To understand delight and be the lord
Even of joy. The dark abysses roll
Beneath this ship on which we glide along,
And he who hath sunk deep into those pools
And hath returned, healed, to the world of light,
His laughter, if so be it he laughs at all,
Is worth a freight of gold.

OTTEGEBE

What is it with me?

BENEDICT

Yield thee! Bow down!

HENRY

Nay, do not bow at all.
Arise, oh proudly rise and lift thee up!

OTTEGEBE

[*Arises, trembling and blessed.*
As thou commandest, lord.

HENRY

[*To* BENEDICT.
Do thou thy work!
[FATHER BENEDICT *exchanges the rings and the chimes begin softly to sound.*

OTTEGEBE

Oh, thou hast suffered so much, thou poor Henry.

HENRY

Thou more than I. Let us not speak thereof.
'Tis in the holy Koran written down
That after bitterness comes sweetness too.

OTTEGEBE

Let all be as thou wilt.

BENEDICT

That will is done!
[HENRY *draws* OTTEGEBE *to him and they find each other in a long kiss.*

OTTEGEBE

Despite all things, I die that sweet death now.

HENRY

[*Crowning himself with the second crown.*
And thus once more I seize possession of
Mine ancient lands. I have died, I have arisen!
The two beats of the hammer of the bell
Eternity. Free am I of the ban!
Oh, let my falcons, let mine eagles rise!

The Dramatic Works of Gerhart Hauptmann

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Since the death of Ibsen, Hauptmann has been generally recognized as the foremost Continental dramatist, and a virtually complete edition of his plays in English is therefore an event of considerable importance.

THE OUTLOOK (London):

The event is certainly the most important one in the English literature of the European theatre since the collected edition of the plays of Ibsen.

New York Times:

The second volume sustains the promise of the first.

The Clarion (London):

In our considered opinion Hauptmann not only stands a clear head above any English, French or Italian playwright of our day, but in some respects he surpasses Ibsen, whose work he carries on and developes. . . . We hope that lovers of good literature . . . will support the publisher and Professor Lewisohn.

Daily Express (London):

The publisher is to be congratulated on his enterprise of publishing in English . . . the complete dramatic works of Hauptmann, by far the most important of contemporary German dramatists.

Sheffield Telegraph:

Hauptmann, it is plain enough, is a dramatist that readers of no nation can afford to leave out of account. . . . There is no living German writer who so well deserves the honour of complete translation into English.

Reedy's Mirror (St. Louis):

The silent burden of these plays is the injustice and the inhumanity of the social order. The author, however, has very little of the acrid temper and narrow-mindedness of the special pleader. His sole aim is to show humanity, and to show it just as it is. The exactness and largeness of his vision of men is very striking. His plays body forth the passions and events that are timeless and constant in the onward march of mankind. They produce the impression of having been dropped from the fullness of life. The monumental task of translating Hauptmann has been successfully accomplished by Mr. Lewisohn. His handling of the dialects is very creditable, and his version of Hauptmann merits a standard place on our book-shelves.

American Review of Reviews:

The publishing house of Huebsch offers one of the most important editions of the year—the dramatic works of the Nobel Prize winner, Gerhart Hauptmann. The plays are given in an authorized translation with an able introduction by their editor.

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Hauptmann, Gerhart Johann Robert.

The dramatic works of Gerhart Hauptmann